

The Drama
of
Honoré de Balzac

BY

WALTER SCOTT HASTINGS

A DISSERTATION

SUBMITTED TO THE BOARD OF UNIVERSITY STUDIES OF THE JOHNS
HOPKINS UNIVERSITY IN CONFORMITY WITH THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

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I

INTRODUCTION

Honoré de Balzac, the novelist and short-story writer, has been the object of countless critical and popular studies. Nearly every phase of the author's work has been treated, to say nothing of the mass of biographical data that patient and painstaking critics have collected. In Spoelberch de Lovenjoul's extremely valuable book, devoted to the history of Balzac's works,¹ there are no less than forty-five pages of critical bibliography. The present study, however, will deal with a phase of his work which has been purposely neglected by the majority of Balzac students: his drama. Such studies as have been already made are far from complete, and the Balzac drama remains little known in its entirety.² Marcel Barrière, whose treatment of Balzac's literary labors is for the most part sympathetic and exact, dismisses the drama with a few general considerations such as the following: "Un romancier a toujours, plus ou moins, le tempérament d'un auteur dramatique."³ In Biré's excellent volume, the author has brought to light a quantity of interesting biographical material concerning Balzac historian, royalist and dramatist, but in treating the latter phase he has confined himself more especially to a history of the plays, to a discussion of the successive stages leading to their production or refusal by Parisian theatrical directors. Paul Flat, in his essay of fifteen pages, traces the motives which induced Balzac to write plays, the cause of his failure, and concludes summarily that the drama is a negligible part of his work. It is scarcely necessary to mention here the pages in Lemer's work on Balzac⁴ which contain merely a few personal recollections of the plays. M. Le Breton would like to find in the drama some germ of Balzac's influence upon the realistic stage, but concludes, and with reason, that the younger Dumas and Augier found inspira-

¹ *Histoire des œuvres de Honoré de Balzac*, 1879; second edition, 1886; third edition, 1888. References in this study are to the third edition.

² See especially Edmond Biré, *Honoré de Balzac*, 1897; Paul Flat, *Seconds Essais sur Balzac*, 1894.

³ *L'Œuvre de Balzac*, 1890, p. 453.

⁴ *Balzac: sa vie—son œuvre*, 1892, pp. 338-343.

tion not in the actual stage productions of this "father of realism," but in the Human Comedy.⁵

However negative the results that may be obtained, the motives which tempted the great novelist to write plays and the fashion in which he conceived them, his knowledge of the theatre of his day and his actual contact with the stage are all questions which should interest the Balzac student. To treat these questions, emphasizing the fact that Balzac was haunted throughout his life by the desire for dramatic success, and that at no time was his mind entirely free of theatrical projects, is the purpose of this study.

Theatrical projects occupied Balzac's mind during the whole of his literary career. During the labor of composition of the unlucky *École des ménages*, the author wrote to Armand Pérémé:

J'ai, depuis dix ans, travaillé en vue du théâtre, et vous connaissez mes idées à cet égard. Elles sont vastes, et leur réalisation m'effraie souvent. Mais je ne manque ni de constance ni de travaux refaits avec patience. . . . [Pour réussir,] il ne faut que du travail, soutenu de quelque chose que je me sens en moi: *motus*!⁶

There is the same note of tireless endeavor in these lines that Balzac voiced so often about the composition of his novels. At the time this letter was written, the author of *le Dernier Chouan*, *le Père Goriot* and *Eugénie Grandet* had already become a name in Parisian literary circles, and was safely on the road to novelistic success. The idea, however, of placing his figures of fiction directly before an audience, and the desire to see the strong reflection of the footlights in their faces never ceased to torment him. Balzac himself recounts the warning which the poet Heine once made to him when the two were discussing the stage:

Prenez-y garde: celui qui s'est habitué à Brest ne peut pas s'accoutumer à Toulon. Restez dans votre baignoire.⁷

This advice we know Balzac did not heed. Besides his six published plays, we have the evidence of numerous other dramatic projects from scattered fragments, scenarios, scenes and lists of personages.⁸

⁵Balzac, *l'homme et l'œuvre*, 1905.

⁶December 4, 1838. Letter published in Lovenjoul's *Autour de Honoré de Balzac*, p. 119.

⁷*LEt.*, Vol. I, p. 412. July 19, 1837.

⁸At the death of the Viscount Spoelberch de Lovenjoul, a most ardent and conscientious bibliophile, his magnificent collection of Balzaciana, including the theatrical fragments, became the property of the French government, and was placed at Chantilly under the care of M. Georges Vicaire. See É. Henriot, in *les Annales romantiques*, Vol. XI, 1. 1914.

Why then was Balzac attracted towards the theatre?

We find a partial solution of the question in one of the greatest factors in his life: the need of money. A successful play meant primarily to the novelist a solution of pressing financial difficulties, and at what period of his life was he free from these? From the miserable days in the Lesdiguières garret, the desire for wealth became an obsession, and at no moment in his career did the furtive millions come within his grasp. They constitute, as it were, the great romance and the great tragedy of his life, and no study of Balzac can be separated from this theme. When the novelist set out with the energy of Napoleon to conquer Europe with his pen,⁹ the gigantic labor of his task and the fury of his production were scarcely in proportion to the financial returns they brought him:

Pour me liquider, cette effroyable production de livres, qui a entraîné des masses d'épreuves, ne suffit pas. Il faut en venir au *théâtre*, dont les revenus sont énormes comparés à ceux que nous font les livres.¹⁰

Again he writes:

Le théâtre me vaudrait deux cent mille francs par an. Je sais, à n'en pas douter, que j'y ferais en peu de temps ma fortune, mais vous oubliez que je n'ai pas six mois à moi, ni un mois, sans cela je n'eusse pas fait une pièce, j'aurais été vous voir.¹¹

Dramatic works, he repeats time and time again, are more productive than novels, and his whole attitude towards them was one of confidence in their financial success. On the eve of *Vautrin*, his principal interest and anxiety seems to have been centered about this one fact:

Jugez quelles seront mes angoisses pendant la soirée où *Vautrin* sera représenté. Dans cinq heures de temps, il sera décidé si je paie ou si je ne paie pas mes dettes.¹²

Again, he says of *Vautrin*:

Il paraît que je puis compter sur un grand succès d'argent; je l'ai faite pour cela.¹³

As rapidly as theatrical propositions were made to Balzac, he calculated their probable financial result scene by scene. Speaking of a proposed play called *la Gina*, he writes to Mme Hanska:

"Ce qu'il avait commencé par l'épée, je l'achèverai par la plume," Balzac is related to have inscribed on a statuette of the Emperor. Gozlan, *Balzac chez lui*, 1862, p. 214.

¹⁰ *LEt.*, Vol. I, p. 273. August 23, 1835.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 240. March 11, 1835.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 530. February 10, 1840.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 525. January 20, 1840.

Les propositions ne me manquent pas. On m'offre, d'un côté, vingt mille francs de prime, pour quinze actes, et j'ai les quinze actes dans la tête, mais non sur le papier.¹⁴

It is with a note of despair that Balzac describes to Mme Zulma Carraud the refusal by the Renaissance of his *École des ménages*. He needed six thousand francs by the end of February; he began to work feverishly at his play, sleeping three hours out of the twenty-four, employing twenty extra men at the printing office. The play was turned down for a new production of Dumas'.¹⁵

Not until Balzac began to meditate his comedy *Mercadet* do we find him enthusiastic over a theatrical success in any other light than financial. *Mercadet* was to his mind something worth while:

C'est exclusivement une comédie, et j'espère cette fois avoir un succès et satisfaire les exigences littéraires.¹⁶

Mercadet, he declares, is a gay production which should enliven and elevate the disgusting atmosphere of the boulevard stage.¹⁷

But the desire for gain was not the only spur which goaded Balzac on to playwrighting. In 1842, he writes to Mme Hanska:

Je vais voir un drame à l'Odéon, celui qui me précède, *Cédric-le-Norvégien*, de Pyat. Hier *Lorenzino*, de Dumas, est tombé; *la Chatne*, de Scribe, n'a pas été un succès. Ce serait bien beau pour moi si j'étais le succès de la saison!¹⁸

The ambition to succeed in more than one type of literary production helped to turn Balzac to the stage. Other novelists—in fact, most of the contemporaries—had tried their hand at the theatre, and were being talked about. Hugo had produced *Lucrèce Borgia* and *Marie-Tudor* in 1833, *Angélo* in 1835, and *Ruy Blas* in 1838; Vigny's novels, *Cinq-Mars* and *Stello*, were followed in 1835 by a play, *Chatterton*; and, finally, Dumas became immensely popular for a time after *Henri III* and *Antony*. George Sand was likewise writing for the stage, and Balzac confesses that it is the diversity of Musset's work that pleases him.¹⁹ But these romantic plays were short-lived, and the public soon became dissatisfied with the ordinary type of melodrama. In 1840, *Hernani* and *la Maréchale d'Ancre* failed. Vigny did not possess the dramatic instinct, and left the stage early.

¹⁴ *LEt.*, Vol. I, p. 489. September 17, 1838.

¹⁵ *Corr.*, p. 327. March, 1839.

¹⁶ *LEt.*, Vol. I, p. 536. May 10, 1840.

¹⁷ *LEt.*, Vol. II, p. 329. March 11, 1844.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 21.

¹⁹ *La Revue parisienne*, August 25, 1840.

Dumas, moreover, was forced to amuse his audiences with immense kaleidoscopic effects. In 1838, Gautier writes:

Le mouvement si énergiquement imprimé à l'art dramatique par *Christine, Hernani, Henri III*, ne s'est pas continué; nous avons cru un moment que nous allions avoir un théâtre moderne; mais nos espérances ont été trompées.²⁰

Balzac felt that there was work for him to do in this field. With Sand, Musset, Dumas, Hugo and others busily engaged in writing plays, the stage, as Paul Flat so justly remarks, became for him "une nécessité littéraire."²¹ As we shall see, at the beginning of his literary career, dramatic projects occupied a vast amount of space. At the very height of his novelistic success, stirred by the ambition to emulate his contemporaries, he returned to the stage, and busied himself with scenic plans until the end of his life.

However, the fruitless search for financial success and for reputation in a wider field, already conquered by other men of genius, were not the only reasons for Balzac's dramatic activity. There is also apparent an unselfish aspiration to broaden his genius, an effort which can be explained by the nature of the man himself. The dramatic form was well-suited and well-nigh a necessity to such a mind as his, devoured by a passion for life. Léon Gozlan relates a conversation between Balzac and the notorious police-agent, Vidocq, during which the latter held that reality was more dramatic than fiction. Balzac is quoted as replying:

Ah! vous croyez à la réalité, mon cher Vidocq. Vous me charmez. Je ne vous aurez pas supposé si naïf. La réalité! parlez-m'en. Vous revenez de ce beau pays. Allons donc! C'est nous qui la faisons, la réalité!²²

Balzac was this "maker of reality," whose powerful imagination would not let him rest from his probing and dissection and reproduction of society. The Human Comedy was to be a faithful representation of this labor:

J'ai entrepris l'histoire de toute la société. J'ai exprimé souvent mon plan dans cette seule phrase: "Une génération est un drame à quatre ou cinq mille personnages saillants." Ce drame, c'est mon livre.²³

In the Human Comedy we discover the presence of more than one precious dramatic gift. Gautier has noted perhaps the capital one:

²⁰ *Histoire de l'art dramatique*, Vol. I, p. 84.

²¹ *Seconds Essais sur Balzac*, p. 106.

²² *Balzac chez lui: Souvenirs des Jardies*, 1862, p. 214.

²³ *Œuvres*, Vol. XXII, p. 547.

Une qualité de Balzac semblait le prédestiner au théâtre, c'est la puissance de peindre les caractères.²⁴

His characters were real personages to him. It was his great boast that they should rival life itself. They spoke to him; he could see their rags and their furs; their gestures, their tricks of speech, their passions haunted his dreams. Werdet, in his book of personal reminiscences,²⁵ cites many instances of his friend's confusion of reality and fiction.

But it is not alone in his force of characterization that Balzac has displayed a dramatic turn of mind. He possessed also a sense for situation and for dialogue. Hostile glances exchanged by two jealous women over a tea-table furnished the germ of his drama, *la Marâtre*.²⁶ He knew how to seize upon a dramatic moment and to reproduce it in the manner of a veritable *coup de théâtre*. At times, the novelistic framework seems to drop completely, and stage-scenes, which might be transported to the theatre and the actors without the change of a word, stand forth in bold relief. Such is the scene in *la Rabouilleuse* of Philippe Bridau's drunken delirium at the bedside of his dying aunt. Such again is the scene in which the ghastly old Colonel Chabert arrives at Derville's office after midnight:

Monsieur, lui dit Derville, à qui ai-je l'honneur de parler?

—Au Colonel Chabert.

—Lequel?

—Celui qui est mort à Eylau.

Balzac's genius was of that peculiar type which was bound to lead him to the theatre. He possessed the dramatic sense for characterization, for situation and for dialogue. He knew, to borrow a definition of Houssaye's,²⁷ "l'art de faire sortir, de situations qu'on voit tous les jours dans la vie réelle, des scènes du plus grand effet dramatique, sans employer d'autres ressources que les sentiments et les passions." Such a temperament was bound to approach the stage, where living actors might translate into action the creatures of his lively imagination, and where a public might come into contact with his world.

When we seek to discover what direct contact Balzac during his early life had with the stage, we are surprised to find almost a void.

²⁴ *Histoire de l'art dramatique*, Vol. III, p. 102.

²⁵ *Portrait intime de Balzac. Sa vie, son humeur et son caractère*, 1859.

²⁶ See pp. 108-9.

²⁷ *Les Hommes et les idées*, 1886, p. 203.

He seems neither to have been a theatre-goer²⁸ nor to have read many plays. This may be easily explained by the fact that he had neither the time nor the money for such luxuries. His first real association with the stage dated from the days of the Lesdiguières garret and the drama in verse which he called *Cromwell*. His interest at this time seems divided between the classical drama, which he did not know well, and the historical play, so much in vogue at the moment. To his sister he writes in 1819 about Lebrun's tragedy, *Marie Stuart*, which was then being given at the Théâtre Français.²⁹ He declares that subjects taken from antiquity are the most favorable for tragedy, and that it is difficult to render a modern subject interesting. Our statesmen, he says, are all monotonous, and crimes of diplomacy are undramatic. He seems to have been thoroughly sincere in his classical leanings at this time. Corneille he calls "mon vieux général," and his greatest desire is to emulate Racine.³⁰ After the production of his first plays we find him declaring in the face of Hugo that Racine is perfection; that *Bérénice* will never be surpassed, and that *Phèdre* is the greatest rôle in modern times.³¹ The first of the great classic plays that Balzac seems to have seen was *Cinna*. "Je n'ai pas encore vu jouer les pièces de Corneille, notre général," he writes to Mme Surville on the eve of witnessing a performance of that play.³² Later, we shall see that the impression left by this masterpiece was to make itself felt in Balzac's first drama. He professes total ignorance about the staging of plays and of the manner in which verses are recited. Still, he had read both Corneille and Racine, declared that Racine's verse seems superior to that of Corneille, and in 1825 he prefaced the edition of Molière which his own printing-house prepared with a *notice* on the great comedian.³³ Later on in his life Balzac was more intimately associated with plays and the players. He knew the elder Dumas and Victor Hugo, and counted Théophile Gautier among his warmest friends. He was associated also with the leading actors of the day: Frédérick

²⁸ "Il allait peu dans les théâtres; on ne l'a peut-être pas vu trois fois dans sa vie au foyer de la Comédie-française."—Gozlan, *Balzac en pantoufles*, 1865, p. 17.

²⁹ *Corr.*, p. 11.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 18.

³¹ *LEt.*, Vol. II, p. 94. December 21, 1842.

³² *Corr.*, p. 12.

³³ *Œuvres complètes de Molière*. Paris, Delongchamps, Urbain Canel, Baudouin frères, 1826. The *notice* is published in *Œuvres*, Vol. XXII, pp. 1-8.

Lemaître, Marie Dorval, Henry Monnier and others. In 1830, when he published with Émile de Girardin *le Feuilleton des journaux politiques*, he devoted considerable space to active dramatic criticism.

Balzac had certain definite ideas about the romantic drama, and attacked it bitterly in *la Caricature* and *le Feuilleton des journaux politiques*. In general this criticism is vigorous and just. *Hernani* is made the subject of two detailed articles in *le Feuilleton*, dated March 24 and April 7, 1830.³⁴ Balzac attacks boldly the salient romantic faults exemplified in this play: the improbabilities of the action, the misappropriation of history, the lack of invention, the unreal characters. "Un drame est l'expression d'une passion humaine, d'une individualité ou d'un fait immense." *Hernani*, he concludes, belongs in none of these categories. The characters are not created according to "bon sens," Don Ruy is stupid, and Don Carlos might easily have been either Louis XVI or Louis XV. The subject is neither true to life nor reasonable, and suggests rather the matter of a ballad. Thus the play is undramatic, resembling the early work of Lope de Vega or of Calderon.

After *Marie-Tudor*, in 1833, Balzac utters a storm of angry protest against Hugo's manner.³⁵ But he gives vent to his most biting sarcasm regarding *Ruy Blas*, which he terms "une énorme bêtise, une infamie en vers."³⁶ After *Lucrèce Borgia*, he writes:

J'ai vu *Lucrèce*. . . C'est un pastiche de Chénier, comme trente poètes de second ordre actuels eussent pu le mieux faire. Et, quand à la pièce, il n'y a rien de plus enfant, de plus nul, de plus tragédie de collège! . . . Hugo a bien mérité par ses sottises que Dieu lui envoyât un Ponsard pour rival! Ah! si vous saviez comme *Lucrèce* est chose ennuyeuse! En France il n'y a de grand que ce qui est *nié*. Rousseau, Voltaire, Montesquieu, La Fontaine, Racine et Molière même, tous ont été niés, discutés, combattus.³⁷

Later, the public acclaims *les Burgraves* as the highest expression of lyricism. Lyricism, says Balzac, is not dramatic.³⁸ He ridicules in this play the unreal stage appurtenances, the poor invention and Hugo's abuse of history:

J'étais à la première représentation des *Burgraves*. Il y a de magnifique poésie, mais Victor Hugo est décidément resté *l'enfant sublime*, et ne sera que cela. C'est toujours les mêmes enfantillages de prison, de cercueil, d'invéraisemblances de la dernière

³⁴ *Œuvres*, Vol. XXII, pp. 44-56.

³⁵ *LEt.*, Vol. I, pp. 81 and 85.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 503. November 15, 1838.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, Vol. II, p. 158. May 11, 1843.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 94. December 21, 1842.

absurdité. Comme histoire, il n'en faut pas parler; comme invention, c'est de la dernière pauvreté. Mais la poésie enlève. C'est Titien peignant sur un mur de boue. Il y a surtout une absence de *cœur*, qui se fait de plus en plus sentir. Victor Hugo n'est pas *vrai*.³⁹

Of the other contemporary dramatists Balzac has little to say. After witnessing the first performance of *la Camaraderie ou la Courte-Échelle*, he decides that Scribe knows his "métier," but that he is ignorant of art. He recognizes his talent and his tact, but he deplors his lack of seriousness and depth, and consequently his feeble style.⁴⁰ Eugène Sue fares scarcely better, for *Latréaumont* he calls a "slack" play, and its author "un esprit borné et bourgeois," incapable of treating the gigantic aspects of Louis XIV's age.⁴¹ This judgment is excessive, inspired no doubt by Sue's blasphemous treatment, to Balzac's mind, of the greatest epoch in French history.

For the vaudeville Balzac expresses the utmost scorn:

Il vaut mieux une belle page non payée que cent mille francs d'un mauvais vaudeville.⁴²

Casting aside his projected play called *la Gina*, he says:

J'ai trouvé mon personnage inadmissible. Un auteur de vaudeville n'eût pas été arrêté par cette difficulté.⁴³

Perhaps the bitterest attack on this popular form of amusement is made in the following lines, after he had witnessed one of the numerous vaudevilles made up of Napoleonic episodes, so popular about 1830:

J'ai été voir Virginie Déjazet représentant Napoléon. Excellent plaisanterie! Pendant que M. Victor Hugo fait des odes à la Colonne, il y a d'autres hommes qui la dépècent, la taillent, se la partagent et la mettent en pièces de six liards, afin de donner à tout le monde un grand homme en petite monnaie. Napoléon en vaudeville, prostitué par des comédiens de l'Ambigu-Comique, des Variétés, ou M. Cazot s'est chargé de nous en offrir les traits, du Vaudeville, du Cirque-Olympique, etc., est tout à fait digne de Napoléon en sucre d'orge, en liqueur, en savon.⁴⁴

One very interesting bit of criticism from Balzac's pen concerns the work of Edouard Ourliac, and his short story entitled *Collinet*.⁴⁵

³⁹ *LEt.*, Vol. II, p. 125. March 19, 1843.

⁴⁰ *Corr.*, p. 303. June 18, 1838.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 280, 281. January 20, 1838. Balzac's opinion of Sue personally is energetically expressed in a letter to Mme Hanska, *LEt.*, Vol. I, p. 321. April 25, 1836.

⁴² *LEt.*, Vol. I, p. 197. October 18, 1834.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 489. September 18, 1838.

⁴⁴ *Lettres sur Paris*. October 18, 1830. *Œuvres*, Vol. XXIII, p. 113.

⁴⁵ *La Revue parisienne*, August 25, 1840. *Œuvres*, Vol. XXIII, pp. 745-48.

Ourliac, it will be remembered, was, along with Gautier, Laurent-Jan and others, to have been one of the collaborators in *Vautrin*. What Balzac admires especially in the young man's work is his handling of dialogue, his unexpected and sudden flashes of meridional wit—very precious dramatic traits—his clearness of vision and vivacity, so needful for the stage.

Collinet contient une puissante et belle comédie, nous en verrons peut-être tirer quelque misérable vaudeville; tandis que, si les destinées du Théâtre-Français étaient entre les mains dignes de les diriger, M. Ourliac serait déjà prié peut-être de travailler.

Ourliac, he declares, is a first-rate dramatist with talent, and would furnish the Théâtre-Français with excellent work, at a moment when they are accepting poor compositions from incompetent authors. Balzac has repeatedly voiced this note of regret in criticizing the stage. Playwrights, to satisfy the hollow tastes and insistent demands of the day, have exhausted their ideas. In his *Lettre aux écrivains français*⁴⁶ he describes with some bitterness the state of the theatre in his day. A typical audience, uncultivated and uneducated, goes to see a play merely to be soothed to sleep after a heavy dinner! To satisfy these tastes, Paris, with its twelve theatres, offering to dramatic literature a budget of ten millions or more, is choked with thin, imitative plays, without creation or ideas, which will last perhaps for six weeks. The theatrical public demands a new play for every day in the year, and the authors, to fulfill this craving, themselves void of originality, go to novels, "prenant leur bien où ils le trouvent." In his *Lettres sur Paris*, Balzac writes:

Quand au théâtre, il est dans un état de marasme incroyable; mais il faut attribuer ce calme désespérant à des causes secrètes qu'il ne serait pas encore convenable de vous dévoiler. Au Théâtre-Français, M. Alexandre Dumas s'oppose à la représentation d'*Antony*. M. Casimir Delavigne retient *Louis XI* en portefeuille, M. Victor Hugo sa *Marion Delorme*, MM. Empis et Mazères leur *Changement de Ministère*.⁴⁷

And again he declares:

Quand aux théâtres, à la littérature, à la poésie, tout cela est mort. La tragédie, le talent et les grandes pensées ont trop couru par les rues pour qu'ils soient aux spectacles, ou dans les livres. La comédie commence à lever la tête.⁴⁸

There is a great deal of sound insight and truth in this criticism, and it displays more than a passing interest in the stage. In *Paris en*

⁴⁶ Appeared first, dated Paris, November 1, 1834, in the *Revue de Paris* of November, 1834. Published in *Œuvres*, Vol. XXII, pp. 221 sf.

⁴⁷ A. M. V***, à Besançon, January 29, 1831. *Œuvres*, Vol. XXIII, p. 180.

⁴⁸ A. M. F***, à Tours, September 26, 1830. *Ibid.*, p. 103.

1831,⁴⁹ among the other brief and biting criticisms of the city, Balzac writes that it is a place "où l'on dit le plus mal des comédiens." In 1826, he printed at his own establishment a little 32mo. volume entitled *Petit Dictionnaire critique et anecdotique des enseignes de Paris*⁵⁰ which contains the following amusing sketches of Parisian theatres:

AMBIGU-COMIQUE (Théâtre de l').—S'il y a quelque chose de comique dans ce théâtre, ce n'est certainement pas le genre qu'on y exploite, car il faut une fière dose d'hilarité pour rire à Calas, à l'*Auberge des Adrets*. Le niais n'offre lui-même rien de comique, mais, en revanche, le nombreux public qu'amènent les trophées des héros de mélodrame pourrait bien, à quelques égards, exciter le sourire, le jour de chambrée complète.

Of the Gaieté he says:

. . . Cette arène, où les passions romanesques sont remuées à la pelle.

Of the Gymnase-Dramatique:

Boulevard Bonne-Nouvelle, entre un limonadier et un pâtissier. Dix toises de façade; monument aussi immortel que M. Scribe.

Finally, he describes the Porte-Saint-Martin as follows:

Salle immense, belles décorations, façade plus large qu'artistement dessinée. Mazurier, M. Cooke, *Jocko*, le Monstre, c'est autant de raretés dignes de parcourir les foires.

What conclusion may be drawn from Balzac's dramatic criticism? There seem to be at least two. First, he displays a practical knowledge of the faults of the contemporary stage, and of its needs. After the Revolution of 1830, he sees in dramatic literature that grievous lack of restraint which is its fundamental characteristic, the unbridled striving to do away with traditions, without substituting anything in their place. He condemns the romantic disrespect for manners and historical verity, the lack of invention and reality, the careless psychology, the immense vogue of cheap vaudeville and melodrama, and the play hastily constructed to thrill the grosser public. He condemns the mediocrity of the present-day stage, and the host of second-rate authors: "Au diable la médiocrité," he cries, "au diable les Pradon et les Bauvarlet! il faut être Grétry et Racine."⁵¹

⁴⁹ Dated March 10, 1831. *Œuvres*, Vol. XXI, p. 243.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 116 sf.

⁵¹ *Corr.*, p. 18, 1820.

En littérature, les médiocrités persévérantes font fortune, elles y gagnent l'incognito et dix mille livres de rente. Cela vaut bien une place. Il y a deux cents auteurs dramatiques sur six cents dans ce cas-là à Paris. C'est le dilemme que j'aurais posé si l'on m'avait consulté. J'aurais dit: "Ou Armand a du génie ou il n'a que de l'entêtement; s'il a du génie, il sera malheureux, sans le sou et glorieux comme tous ceux qui ont du génie; s'il a de l'entêtement, il sera M. Clairville, M. Anicet, M. de Comberousse, qui gagnent, en travaillant, en piochant la terre dramatique, quinze ou vingt mille francs par an."⁶²

His solemn advice to Hugo, at the close of his review of *Hernani*, is, in a measure, his advice to all the dramatists of his day: "A moins de travaux consciencieux, d'une grande docilité aux conseils d'amis sévères, la scène lui est interdite."

Balzac has seen the worst faults in the contemporary drama, and has expressed them with a great deal of vigor. However, we cannot say that he has been altogether fair. A certain personal animosity entered into his criticism of Sue. The note of carelessness, almost of frivolity, runs through his criticism of Hugo. He has failed completely to do justice to the poetic qualities of *les Burgraves* and *Ruy Blas*; he has appreciated none of the lyric splendor of the love-duets in *Hernani* or of Triboulet's monologue. *Ruy Blas* he calls "une énorme bêtise, une infamie en vers," before having seen it acted. There is something of Balzac's impetuosity here, something of the triviality also which was inherent in the nature of the man. Later, when we come to study his own plays, we shall see how absolutely he has neglected the warnings given to this leader of a new school, and how easily he succumbed to the worst of the romantic faults. After the unhappy failure of *Vautrin*, it must be remembered that Hugo proved to be a warm friend of Balzac's, and it is no doubt the recollection of this kindness that prompted the latter to write in his *Revue parisienne* of July 25, 1840, the following lines:

Aussi regretté-je qu'à l'exemple de Goëthe, il n'ait pas fait une tragédie du genre classique où il se serait astreint au système sévère de versification et de pensée qui recommande *Britannicus* ou *Cinna*. Il aurait ainsi fermé la bouche à quelques critiques.⁶³

We have seen in the foregoing pages what criticism Balzac makes of the stage. What does he himself propose to do, and what dramatic principles does he intend to hold? Unfortunately, he proposes nothing particularly clear or tangible. He has nowhere set forth his theory of dramatic art, rather he has been satisfied to express a

⁶² *Ibid.*, pp. 596-7. February 9, 1849.

⁶³ *Œuvres*, Vol. XXIII, p. 603.

vague desire to depict the "vrai." This explains, partially, at least, the mediocrity of his own work. Without a clear idea of what he intended to do, he set forth to imitate and to reproduce what had already been done, in spite of his pretensions to create something new.

In 1838, during the composition of *l'École des ménages*, he declares to Mme Hanska that his theatrical ideas are vast, and that he intends to work for the stage with patience and constancy. Notwithstanding such statements as these, Balzac failed to take his drama seriously, and this is his fundamental error. He considered the actual labor involved in making a play much less than that required for a novel. A play would not necessitate hours in a library nor the assiduity demanded by fiction. We know something of his method of composition in general: the construction of a huge and sometimes cumbersome skeleton, to which were added at different times more and still more materials. There was no curtailing, no polishing; rather there were additions of various sorts, with little heed to proportion. Sometimes this huge mass of work was discarded, or gone over with a sweeping hand, remodeled entirely, or, with nothing but the bare framework standing, encrusted with detail. Gautier tells us that this mania for elaboration became lightning-like when he attacked the drama.⁵⁴ We have seen how important a place finance held in his dramatic efforts. Until *Mercadet*, indeed, this preoccupation was almost an obsession. After the failures of his first plays, written hurriedly to save their author from bankruptcy, we find Balzac, no doubt on sound advice from friends, adopting a much saner and less feverish attitude towards the stage. In 1837, he writes:

Une pièce est l'œuvre la plus facile et la plus difficile de l'esprit humain: ou c'est un jouet d'Allemagne, ou c'est une statue immortelle, un polichinelle ou la Vénus, le *Misanthrope* et *Figaro*, ou la *Camaraderie* et la *Tour de Nesles*.⁵⁵

But the fact remains, Balzac never taught himself the lessons which he preached to others, nor did he correct the serious faults committed by the dramatists he imitated.

So much we know about Balzac's methods of composition. His aesthetic theories about playwriting remain vague and formless. He seems, like Dumas the elder, to have had the intention to write plays of diverse nature. Unlike Hugo, he had no definite dramatic

⁵⁴ *Portraits contemporains*, pp. 82 and 119.

⁵⁵ *LEt.*, Vol. I, p. 405.

system, no defined purpose. Every dramatist, he declares, should introduce the corrections of faults into his play, and should put well in the foreground the salutary opposition of good and evil. This was his purpose also in the Human Comedy. About his plays he talks little. *Vautrin*, in the mind of the author, represented the dramatic contrast between a brigand and the law. His historical comedy, *Quinola*, was to depict the struggles of genius with poverty, distrust, ignorance and fate. *L'École des ménages* and *la Marâtre* were to present the terrible ravages of passion in the home, and to preach a moral lesson to the bourgeois. *Mercadet*, "le combat d'un homme contre ses créanciers,"⁵⁶ was to be a pure comedy. This is all. He approached the stage as he did the novel, fully aware of the obstacles across his path, and with a determination to succeed.

Let us now consider the manner in which Balzac has conceived his plays, turning first to the mass of theatrical projects which occupied a great portion of his time, and which were never completed, then to the finished productions from the dramatist's pen, plays which will be studied in detail.

⁵⁶ *LEt.*, Vol. I, p. 536. May 10, 1840.

II

UNFRUITFUL ATTEMPTS AT THE DRAMA

When Balzac became settled in his attic room at 9, Rue de Lesdiguières, to begin his literary career, he was twenty years old. It was the month of March, 1819. He was barely installed in those humble quarters when he began to write, conceiving the plans for various types of productions. Madame Laure de Surville relates in her interesting biography of her brother something of this labor:

Que de travaux il médite! des romans, des comédies, des opéras-comiques, des tragédies sont sur sa liste d'ouvrages à faire. Il ressemble à l'enfant qui a tant de paroles à dire, qu'il ne sait par où commencer. C'est d'abord *Stella et Coqsigrue*, deux livres qui ne virent jamais le jour! De tous ses projets de comédie de ce temps, je me souviens des *Deux Philosophes*, qu'il eût certainement repris à ses loisirs. Ces prétendus philosophes se moquaient l'un de l'autre, se querellaient sans cesse, comme des amis (disait mon frère en racontant cette pièce).

Ces philosophes, tout en méprisant les hochets de ce monde, se les disputaient sans pouvoir les obtenir, insuccès final qui les raccomodait et leur faisait maudire en commun la détestable engeance humaine!¹

These early productions were soon abandoned. It is interesting, however, that the first word he writes to his family at the beginning of his literary career is about theatrical projects. To his sister, in a letter dated September 6, 1819, he says:

J'ai décidément abandonné mon opéra-comique. Je ne puis trouver un compositeur dans mon trou; je ne dois pas, d'ailleurs, écrire pour le gout actuel, mais faire comme ont fait les Racine et les Corneille, travailler comme eux pour la postérité!²

His first thought about the drama, and indeed about literature, was to write for posterity. The comedy abandoned, he draws up the plans for a much more ambitious work, this time a tragedy in five acts and in verse, having for its subject the condemnation and death of Charles I of England.³ He hesitated as to whether he should entitle his composition *Cromwell*, *Henriette d'Angleterre* or *le Régicide*. He entered heart and soul into his work, talking frankly about his efforts to depict the hearts of his characters, and to analyze their

¹*Œuvres*, Vol. XXIV, pp. xx-xxi.

²*Corr.*, p. 5.

³The complete text of *Cromwell* is to be found in the Chantilly collection of Balzac drama, with notes and modifications made by Spoelberch de Lovenjoul in view of a possible production.

sentiments.⁴ "De toutes les affections de l'âme, la douleur est la plus difficile à peindre," he writes.⁵ He found difficulties at the outset with his verse.⁶ A monologue after the manner of Chapelain, at first sight good, turned out to be abominable verse,⁷ and it was in vain that he read for inspiration the tragedies of Crébillon, Voltaire, Corneille and Racine. Repeatedly he asks his sister for advice, calling for color and a certain romantic flavor which he lacks and terms, "la fibre ossianesque."⁸ Finally, by the end of June, 1820, he leaves Paris and goes to the family home at Villeparisis to read his play. According to Champfleury,⁹ the academician, Andrieux, professor of literature at the Collège de France and a staunch upholder of the classical tradition, was called in to judge the play. Champfleury recounts the verdict which the older man, himself a playwright, passed: "Que le jeune homme fasse quoi que ce soit, excepté de la littérature."

The plan of the play is recounted by Balzac in the following lines:

Acte premier.

Henriette d'Angleterre, accablée de fatigue et déguisée sous d'humbles vêtements, entre dans Westminster, soutenue par le fils de Strafford; elle revient d'un long voyage. Elle a été, selon l'ordre de Charles I^{er}, conduire ses enfants en Hollande et solliciter des secours à la cour de France. Strafford en larmes lui apprend les derniers événements. Le roi, prisonnier dans Westminster, accusé par le Parlement, attend son jugement. Tu comprends l'élan de la reine à ces nouvelles; elle veut partager le sort de son époux.

Entrent Cromwell et son gendre Ireton. Ils ont donné rendez-vous dans ce lieu aux conjurés.

La reine, effrayée, se cache derrière une tombe royale.

Les conspirateurs arrivent et elle entend discuter si on fera ou non mourir le roi. Scène fort vive où Fairfax (un honnête garçon) défend les jours de l'illustre prisonnier et dévoile l'ambition de Cromwell. Celui-ci rassure tout son monde. Après quoi, on conclut à la peine de mort.

La reine se montre et leur fait un fameux discours! . . .

Cromwell et ses amis la laissent parler, enchantés de tenir une victime qui leur manquait. Il sort avec ses complices pour assurer le succès de leurs projets, et la reine se rend auprès du prisonnier.

⁴ *Corr.*, p. 5.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 18. 1820.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 16.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 20. September, 1819. This letter has been dated incorrectly in the definitive edition, Calmann-Lévy, 1876.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 7. September 6, 1819.

⁹ *Grandes Figures d'hier et d'aujourd'hui*. 1861. See also the unsigned article *Honoré de Balzac in la Revue française*, June 10, 1856.

Acte deuxième

Charles I^{er}, seul, repasse dans sa mémoire les événements et les faits de son règne. Quel monologue!

La reine arrive. C'est encore là qu'il faudra du talent! L'amour conjugal sur la scène pour tout potage! il faut qu'il embrase la pièce. Il doit régner dans cette entrevue douloureuse un ton si mélancolique et si tendre, que c'est déjà à désespérer; il faut tout bonnement arriver au sublime.

Cromwell vient chercher le roi pour la séance. Scène fort épineuse encore, où il faut mettre en relief les caractères si différents des trois interlocuteurs (étude historique difficile).

Strafford vient avertir la reine qu'une petite armée de royalistes s'est emparée des fils de Cromwell revenant de dompter l'Irlande. En mettant Cromwell entre ses fils et le trône, on sauvera peut-être le roi. L'acte finit sur cette lueur d'espérance.

Acte troisième.

Cromwell attend la reine. Celle-ci lui explique ce que tu sais et le met dans l'alternative de se prononcer. Grand combat dans l'âme du protecteur. Le roi arrive et annonce à Cromwell qu'il a ordonné que ses fils lui soient rendus sans condition. Cromwell, en sortant, laisse le spectateur dans l'attente. Quelques autres scènes entre la reine, le roi, puis Strafford, qui fait observer au roi qu'il se remet sous le couteau.

Tous vont à Westminster.

Acte quatrième.

Cromwell arrive. L'ambition l'emporte. Le parlement est assemblé. Le roi comparait et parle, pour la première et dernière fois, d'un ton. . . . (C'est là qu'il faut être sublime!) La reine, indignée, se présente et défend (Dieu sait comme!) son diable de mari. Cromwell, voyant le parlement s'attendrir, fait retirer le roi et la reine pour délibérer. Au moment où les gardes les emmènent, la reine tente un dernier effort auprès de Cromwell: elle lui offre honneurs, titres, etc. Cromwell reste froid.

La reine sort désespérée.

Acte cinquième (et le plus difficile de tous).

La sentence n'est pas encore connue; mais Charles I^{er}, qui ne s'abuse pas, entretient la reine de ses dernières volontés. (Quelle scène!) Strafford sait la condamnation et vient l'annoncer à son maître afin qu'il y soit préparé avant d'entendre son arrêt. (Quelle scène!) Ireton arrive chercher le roi pour le conduire devant ses juges. Charles I^{er} dit à Strafford qu'il lui réserve l'honneur de le conduire à l'échafaud. Adieux du roi et de la reine. (Quelle scène!) Fairfax accourt; il prévient la reine de son danger, il faut qu'elle fuie sur-le-champ, on veut la retenir prisonnière et lui faire aussi son procès.

La reine, toute à son désespoir, n'entend rien d'abord, puis elle éclate tout à coup en imprécations contre l'Angleterre: elle vivra pour la vengeance, elle lui soulèvera partout des ennemis, la France la combattra, la dominera, l'écrasera un jour.

Ce sera le feu de joie, et je te répons que ce sera tapé de main de maître!

Puis le parterre, trempé de larmes, ira se coucher.¹⁰

¹⁰ *Corr.*, pp. 21-23. 1820.

The plan of *Cromwell* reveals several interesting facts. The trivial plot displays much awkwardness in the art of constructing an intrigue, but at the same time Balzac shows certain psychological preoccupations. Written in 1819, and reworked in 1820, seven years before Hugo established his dramatic principles in a play of the same name, Balzac's plot is frankly romantic. At this time, it will be remembered, the romantic drama was still in its infancy; neither Hugo nor the elder Dumas had begun to write plays, and such liberal classicists as Casimir Delavigne were immensely popular. But the field for future romanticism on the stage was already being cleared at the time Balzac was struggling with his classic verse. The germs of this later drama are to be found in the historical melodrama of the early years of the nineteenth century.¹¹ Ten years before *Hernani* we have a queen disguised and hiding behind a royal tomb at Westminster. She listens to conspirators who discuss the fate of their king. Like Charles V before the tomb of Charlemagne, the English king reviews the events of his reign in a long monologue at the opening of the second act. We are told that a sublime *duo d'amore* is to be enacted between the queen and the king, and finally, in the fifth act, "the most difficult of all," Balzac tells us, the *innocent victim*—the queen—declares that she will avenge her husband's death, whereupon "le parterre, *trempé de larmes*, ira se coucher!" It is curious to note here all the "properties" of the early romantic melodrama. Conspirators had already found ample place in Nepomucène Lemercier's *Pinto* (1800); the disguises, the powerless victim, the abundant pathetic scenes, the solemn monologues and grandiloquent gestures were all dear to the heart of Pixérécourt and his school. Balzac's choice of subject even had already found favor among the dramatists of the moment. In 1820, the Count de Gain-Montaignac published a volume of three plays, one of which dealt with the unhappy English monarch, Charles I.¹² About the same time Mérimée was making his first experiments with the drama, and one of the earliest productions from his pen was a his-

¹¹ On the development of the historical drama and the early romantic drama, see two extremely valuable articles by Jules Marsan in *la Revue d'histoire littéraire: Le Mélodrame et Guilbert de Pixérécourt*, vol. VII, 1900, pp. 196-200; and *le Théâtre historique et le romantisme, 1818-1829*, vol. XVII, 1910, pp. 1-33.

¹² *Théâtre par le Cte J.-R. de Gain-Montaignac, gouverneur du Château Royal de Pau*. Paris, Potey et Petit, [1820].—*Charles-Quint à Saint Just*.—*La Conjuration des adolescents*.—*Charles Premier*.

torical drama called *Cromwell*, a youthful piece of work which was, like Balzac's play, read to friends, but never published.¹³

Notwithstanding the romantic features of the plot of *Cromwell*, Balzac's conception was classic, and we know the models from which he sought inspiration. In October, 1819, Delavigne had produced at the Odéon his *Vêpres siciliennes*, the last in importance of the historical tragedies, and Balzac had no doubt seen it acted. At any rate, in November of the same year, while at work on his drama, the author wrote to a friend, Théodore Dablin, to send him a copy of the play.¹⁴ The elements which attracted him in *les Vêpres siciliennes* were undoubtedly the historical subject, the Cornelian sentiment of patriotism and liberty, the elevated tone and the strict adherence to the classic rules of unity and versification. All of these elements Balzac proposed to introduce in *Cromwell*. The action centers about the soul combat of the Protector and the magnanimity of Charles I. Cromwell's two sons have fallen into the hands of the Royalists, but the king orders their unconditional surrender to their father. The fourth act depicts Cromwell's dilemma, terminating in his refusal to spare the life of the sovereign.

Balzac found justification for his historical subject and, to a certain extent, for his form and matter in the success of Delavigne's play. But he determined also to follow his "vieux général," Corneille. At this time he had seen a performance of *Cinna*, and was stirred by the moral sublimity in the play.¹⁵ This he proposed to reproduce in *Cromwell*. Charles I, in a monologue, reviews the unhappy events of his reign. "Quel monologue!" writes Balzac, as he might also have said of the Emperor's famous speech in *Cinna*, when he recalls the crimes and bloodshed of his reign, and the ingratitude of his friends.¹⁶ Balzac's king, surrendering Cromwell's sons, is also a memory of Augustus's magnanimity, when he heaps favors upon the conspirator, Cinna. Cromwell himself, who has been chosen to liberate England, is like the Corneille hero who believes that

Le ciel entre nos mains a mis le sort de Rome.¹⁷

¹³ See E. Delécluze, *Souvenirs de soixante années*, 1862, p. 223. M. Marsan, in the article cited *supra*, mentions also a play by Charles d'Outrepoint, *la Mort de Charles I*, published a few years later, in 1827.

¹⁴ *Corr.*, p. 15.

¹⁵ Cf. *supra*, p. 7.

¹⁶ Act IV, scene 2.

¹⁷ *Cinna*, Act I, scene 3.

For his character study, Balzac went to Bossuet, and studied the admirable tribute which the latter paid England's unhappy queen.¹⁸ From Bossuet he gleaned certain traits of his king, his justness and clemency, and especially, in the face of betrayal, his greatness of soul. Bossuet's portrayal of Henrietta's self-sacrifices upon her return from the fruitless mission to Holland, her splendid defense of her husband and her pride so sadly humiliated before Cromwell, also attracted Balzac. He sought again his portrait of the Protector from Bossuet, this chief sent by God to liberate a kingdom, but here he hesitates, and cries out: "Bossuet m'épouvante!"¹⁹

Cromwell was a beginning, and displays a serious interest in the stage; this is all we may say of the play. With the pages of his classic "generals" at hand, he set out to treat a modern historical theme, but the task he found too great for his untrained genius, and the result was a frigid and wearisome composition.

During the year 1821 Balzac began to write his first novels, working at his father's home near Paris. These were poor productions, all of them, and no one was quicker to realize it than the author himself. In the meanwhile *Cromwell* remained unfinished; in fact, the last word we hear about it is in a letter to the author's sister in 1822:

Mes idées changent tellement, que le *faire* changerait bientôt! . . . Encore quelque temps, et il y aura entre le moi d'aujourd'hui et le moi de demain la différence qui existe entre le jeune homme de vingt ans et l'homme de trente! Je réfléchis, mes idées mûrissent, je reconnais que la nature m'a traité favorablement en me donnant mon cœur et ma tête. Crois-moi, chère sœur, car j'ai besoin d'une croyante, je ne désespère pas d'être un jour quelque chose. Je vois aujourd'hui que *Cromwell* n'avait pas même le mérite d'être un embryon; quand à mes romans, ils ne valent pas le diable, et ne sont pas si tentateurs surtout.²⁰

A recollection of these youthful dramatic productions is to be found in *la Peau de chagrin* where Balzac writes:

Une comédie devait en peu de jours me donner une renommée, une fortune, et l'entrée de ce monde où je voulais reparaître en y exerçant les droits régaliens de l'homme de génie. Vous avez tous vu dans ce chef-d'œuvre la première erreur d'un jeune homme qui sort du collège, une véritable niaiserie d'enfant.²¹

¹⁸ *Oraison funèbre de Henriette-Marie de France*. November 16, 1669.

¹⁹ *Corr.*, p. 23. For further remarks on the sources of *Cromwell*, see Appendix.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 45.

²¹ *Œuvres*, Vol. XV, p. 82.

It is not until ten years later that Balzac again occupies himself with the stage. During these years the novelist had already come into fame, and some of his best work had been written—*les Chouans*, *Gobseck*, *le Colonel Chabert*, *Louis Lambert*. At this time he was engrossed in his novels, working with his customary feverish haste in his Rue Cassini home, already undergoing the excessive and unnatural régime of long and sleepless hours. Except for a brief hint in his correspondence of certain proposed collaborations with Victor Ratier, editor of *la Silhouette*, whose relations with Balzac were most cordial, no mention is made of theatrical activity until 1834. Balzac's letter to Ratier, written from Nemours in May of 1831, reads in part as follows:

Mon judicieux ami, à mon retour, je ne demande pas mieux, toute spéculation à part, que de travailler avec vous pour le théâtre, en vous laissant tout l'honneur de nos compositions androgynes, de nous donner l'un à l'autre à tour de rôle la canne de l'argousin pour frapper sur le torse du fainéant. . . . Si nous avons le bonheur de faire un bon *Scribe* de notre raison sociale Ratier, ce sera tant mieux et je le désire bien vivement.²²

Except for these few lines, nothing more is said of the proposed work.

The subject of a historical play, with the plot laid at the court of Philip II, seems to have occupied the mind of Balzac for some years. The first mention which is made of such a play is in May, 1834, when he writes to Mme Hanska that he has thought of a tragedy in prose entitled *Don Philippe et Don Charles*.²³ The plans were set aside the following month, and we know little of the nature of these first sketches. The name which the author finally decided to give to his tragedy was *Philippe-le-Réservé*, and he writes of it as follows:

Philippe-le-Réservé (Félicé-il-disco) est mis de côté. Néanmoins, la littérature s'inquiète beaucoup de ma pièce. En réponse à ce que vous daignez m'en écrire, je vous dirai que Carlos a été si fort amoureux de la Reine, qu'il y avait preuve suffisante que l'enfant dont elle est morte enceinte (*traitée pour une hydropisie, car Dieu prit en pitié le trône d'Espagne et aveugla les médecins*, propres termes du méticuleux Mariano), était de l'enfant. Ainsi, dans ma pièce, la Reine est coupable, suivant les idées admises. Carlos idem. Philippe II, Charles, sont joués par Don Juan d'Autriche. Enfin, je me conforme à l'histoire et la suis pied à pied. D'ailleurs, selon toute apparence, cette œuvre sera faite sous vos yeux, car c'est la seule chose que l'on puisse faire en courant, et vous jugerez de la profondeur politique de cette épouvantable tragédie. Il faudra des sondes bien armées de cordes pour la jauger! Deux de mes amis fouillent

²² *Corr.*, p. 83.

²³ *LET.*, Vol. I, p. 156. May 10, 1834.

avec ardeur les manuscrits historiques pour que rien ne me manque. Je veux avoir jusqu'aux *plans* du palais et jusqu'à l'étiquette de la cour d'Espagne sous Philippe II.²⁴

However ardent Balzac's research into Mariana's history and other less meticulous documents may have been at the moment, as he states in his letter, the actual work on this tragedy was delayed until he went to Russia for a few months rest. Later, he refers to the play as *Philippe-le-Discret*,²⁵ and had evidently received suggestions from Mme Hanska concerning it. "Vous avez partagé mes jugements sur Schiller et mes idées sur ce que je dois faire," he writes her on August 11. This sordid subject, the incestuous love of the grandson of Charles V for his step-mother, Elizabeth of Valois, had already been the matter of Schiller's *Don Carlos*,²⁶ and Balzac evidently proposed to make this latter play his point of departure. In October, however, he had not had time to begin his tragedy;²⁷ in fact, he was at that moment interested in other scenic plans together with Jules Sandeau and Arago. Moreover, his theatrical projects were causing him a great deal of trouble. "Mes essais de théâtre vont mal," he writes to his sister, and he mentions the difficulties of the historical drama, which exacts stage effects unknown to him. As for comedy, he is trying to follow Molière and finds him "un maître désespérant." But the real reasons for his failures seem to have been a lack of time and the difficulties which he experienced in having his plays accepted.²⁸ By 1837, he had begun to work on his *École des ménages*, and his historical tragedy was abandoned. It is not until the close of 1841, after the failure of *Vautrin*, that we again hear of a Spanish play written about the court of Philip II, and this time it is not a tragedy, but a comedy: *les Ressources de Quinola*.²⁹

In 1834, Balzac, correcting the proofs of *la Recherche de l'absolu*, and completing *le Père Goriot*, begins to plan a theatrical venture to which he refers as *Marie Touchet*, "une fière pièce, où je dresserai en pied de fiers personnages."³⁰ *Marie Touchet* was actually written, not, however, by the hand of Balzac. The Count Ferdinand de

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 162. June 3, 1834.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 179. August 11, 1834.

²⁶ 1783-7. *Don Carlos, infant d'Espagne, de Schiller*, traduit par Ad. Legay. Paris, an VIII.—*Théâtre de Schiller*, traduit par Lamartellière, Paris, 1799, 2 vol.

²⁷ *LEt.*, Vol. I, p. 198.

²⁸ *Corr.*, p. 200.

²⁹ See p. 72 sf.

³⁰ *Corr.*, p. 198.

Grammont, one of the novelist's friends, was entrusted with the task of writing the play for Balzac, and the manuscript in his handwriting forms a part of the Lovenjoul collection.³¹

In October of 1834 Balzac proposed to collaborate with Jules Sandeau and Emmanuel Arago in a five-act play to be called *les Courtisans*, a production which would pay off their debts and undoubtedly grace the boards of the Théâtre-Français.³² Another play, with Sandeau's collaboration we are told, was begun at the same time, a comedy to bear the name of *la Grande Mademoiselle*—a story of the Duke de Lauzun, which was to have for *dénouement*: *Marie, tire-moi mes bottes*—a comedy to be launched forth into the maelstrom of Parisian melodramas!³³

From October, 1835, until 1848 Balzac was occupied at various moments with a play which he calls *Richard Cœur-d'éponge*, numerous fragments of which are extant in the Chantilly collection.³⁴ The hero of the play is a carpenter by trade, and a drunkard, the latter winning him the soubriquet, "*cœur-d'éponge*." Begun in 1835,³⁵ the idea was taken up again in 1838,³⁶ and still not worked out by 1840, when the following lines were written in the preface to *Vautrin*:

La véritable et meilleure préface de *Vautrin* sera donc le drame de *Richard Cœur-d'éponge*, que l'administration permet de représenter, afin de ne pas laisser les rats occuper exclusivement les planches si fécondes du théâtre de la Porte-Saint-Martin.

During the first months of 1839 three plays were occupying Balzac's attention: *l'École des ménages*, *Richard Cœur-d'éponge*, and a melodrama called *la Gina*.³⁷ This latter play was begun in September of the previous year. Of its character we know very little. "C'est Othello retourné," the author writes to Mme Hanska:³⁸

La Gina sera un Othello femelle. La scène est à Venise, et je veux enfin essayer du théâtre. Les propositions ne me manquent pas. On m'offre, d'un côté, vingt mille francs de prime, pour quinze actes, et j'ai les quinze actes dans la tête, mais non sur le papier.

³¹ Biré, *H. de Balzac*, p. 193.

³² *LEt.*, Vol. I, p. 201. October 26, 1834.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 207. December 1, 1834.

³⁴ Lovenjoul, *Autour de Honoré de Balzac*, p. 57. For a further discussion of *Richard Cœur-d'éponge*, see Appendix.

³⁵ *Corr.*, p. 225.

³⁶ *LEt.*, Vol. I, p. 489.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 507. February 12, 1839.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 489. September 17, 1838.

On the following day, the plans were abandoned, and the author writes characteristically:

Le temps de tourner cette page, j'ai trouvé *la Gina* trop difficile; il y a des raisonnements qui assassinent. Ainsi, dans *Othello*, Iago est le pilier qui soutient la conception, moi, je n'ai que l'intérêt d'argent, au lieu de l'intérêt de l'amour méconnu. J'ai trouvé mon personnage inadmissible. Un auteur de vaudeville n'eût pas été arrêté par cette difficulté.³⁹

In September of 1837 Balzac began to talk of a play, the subject of which was to interest him for a period of years:

"Je commence ce soir," he writes on the first day of the month, "une comédie en cinq actes, intitulée: *Joseph Prudhomme*."⁴⁰ With boldness he declares that the type belongs to Henry Monnier, but adds that a *creation* is not one of the requisites of theatrical success.⁴¹

Seulement, il faut assassiner Monnier, et que mon Prudhomme soit le seul Prudhomme. Il n'a fait, lui, qu'un misérable vaudeville à travestissements; moi, je ferai cinq actes au Théâtre-Français.

All this, to be sure, is little else than pure boasting. There follows in the same letter to Mme Hanska a plan of the comedy.

Prudhomme is in love with the daughter of a portress, a charming girl of eighteen, entirely *comme il faut*, who studies at the Conservatory and sees before her the future of a Mlle Mars. Her name is Paméla. Deceived by a fellow-student, who flees to America, the poor girl is left with a child, a boy. To bring up this child properly she marries Prudhomme without revealing to him her past life. The result of this union is a daughter. All this forms the prologue to the play, and is to be called *le Mariage de Prudhomme*. The real action begins eighteen years later. Prudhomme is now a prosperous banker. Paméla is a model wife, consumed with love for her boy, who, thanks to Prudhomme's generosity, has been well reared, and has lately become a clerk in Prudhomme's establishment. His name is Adolphe. In the meanwhile Prudhomme's daughter has grown up, and has become one of the richest heiresses in Paris. Her fortune tempts an old notary who desires to make a match between his son and the young girl, but Mme Prudhomme looks with disfavor upon this. Noticing the fondness of Mme Prudhomme for Adolphe, the

³⁹ *LEt.*, Vol. I. p. 489. A few summary notes of the plan of *la Gina* actually exist in the Lovenjoul collection. See *Autour de Honoré de Balzac*, p. 58.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 423.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 430, 431. October 10-12, 1837.

notary reports the fact to Prudhomme, and succeeds in kindling the husband's jealousy. Unable to explain her relationship to the young man, Paméla allows unjust accusations to fall upon her head, but takes her revenge by refusing to consent to the proposed marriage of her daughter. Adolphe is sent away. The return of Paméla's former lover furnishes the climax. Prudhomme, suspecting the truth, resorts to the ruse of pretending to marry brother and sister in order to assure himself of his wife's relation to Adolphe.

Such, in the main, was the proposed plot of this satire on bourgeois manners. The rôle of Paméla was destined for Mlle Mars. Balzac frankly admits that these plans were pushed forward by an urgent need of money. Furthermore, he proposed to write under an assumed name an additional piece with the same characters, a vaudeville to be called *Prudhomme bigame*.

Prudhomme est avare; il tient sa femme fort juste, elle fait le ménage; c'est une servante déguisée sous le titre d'*épouse*. Elle n'a jamais été au bal de l'Opéra. Sa voisine veut l'emmener et, après s'être informée des habitudes conjugales de Joseph Prudhomme, les deux femmes font un mannequin qui ressemble à madame Prudhomme, le laissent dans le lit et vont au bal masqué. Prudhomme rentre, fait ses monologues, interroge sa femme qui dort; enfin, il se couche. A cinq heures sa femme rentre, et il se trouve deux femmes! Vous ne devinez guère les bouffonneries que nos acteurs feront avec ce croquis, mais je vous jure que si cela prend, les Parisiens viendront voir cela cent fois. Dieu le veuille! Il ne m'en coûtera qu'une matinée, et cela peut valoir quinze mille francs. Voilà la meilleure bouffonnerie! Mais tout dépend de tant de choses! Il me faut un prête-nom; puis, les théâtres, c'est une sentine, et mon pied est vierge de souillure. Peut-être la première et dernière représentation sera-t-elle dans cette lettre.⁴²

The latter statement was true, and this is the last we hear of *Prudhomme bigame*.

On November 7, 1837, Balzac writes to Mme Hanska that his comedy had been begun, but that he was finding difficulties with the great work which was to throw Monnier in the shade!⁴³ He writes:

Il faut que chaque mot soit un arrêt prononcé sur les mœurs de l'époque. Il ne faut pas choisir les sujets minces ni mesquins. Il faut entrer dans le fond des choses, en sorte qu'il faut constamment embrasser l'état social et le juger sous une forme plaisante. Il y a mille choses à dire, et il ne faut dire que la bonne, en sorte qu'il y a mille pensées rebutées sous une expression qui demeure. Ce travail me confond. Il va sans dire que j'entends parler d'une œuvre de génie, car pour les trente mille pièces qu'on nous a données depuis quarante ans, rien n'est plus facile à faire. Je suis très

⁴² *LEt.*, Vol. I, p. 197. October 18 and 19, 1834.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 443.

envahi par cette comédie; je ne pense qu'à cela, et chaque pensée en étend les difficultés. Ce ne sera rien que de la faire; il faudra la faire représenter, et elle peut tomber.⁴⁴

With the ardor so typical of Balzac, one detail of Prudhomme's life suggested another. He laid the plans for other plays, all dealing with the same hero. Before producing *Prudhomme parvenu*, he writes, he must depict *Prudhomme se mariant*. "Ainsi me voilà avec huit actes sur les bras au lieu de cinq."⁴⁵

In August of the next year, after his return from Corsica, Balzac writes Mme Hanska that he has been promised twenty thousand francs for *le Mariage de Joseph Prudhomme* on the day of the first reading, but that he has not begun the play.⁴⁶

Balzac's interest in Henry Monnier, the Phellion of *les Employés* (1837) and of *les Petits bourgeois* (1844), author, caricaturist, playwright and actor, is important. He was intimately acquainted with the work of this versatile genius, praising it at various times in his critical reviews.⁴⁷ Monnier, like Balzac, had served time in a notary's office, and later in the Ministry of Justice, where he became intimately acquainted with a great variety of types of government clerks and officials. In 1828 he published an album entitled *Mœurs administratives dessinées d'après nature*, in which the various types of employés were caricatured. This was followed by an amusing series of pen sketches called *Scènes populaires*, which later grew to the extent of eight volumes. In these sketches and in a vaudeville entitled *la Famille improvisée*, appeared for the first time the famous character of Joseph Prudhomme, "professeur d'écriture, élève de Brard et Saint-Omer, expert assermenté près les cours et tribunaux!" *La Famille improvisée*, a series of comic episodes had been arranged for the stage by three vaudevillists, Dupeuty, Duvert and the well-known Brazier. It was produced for the first time at the Théâtre du Vaudeville on July 5, 1831.⁴⁸ The thread of this amusing caricature is briefly as follows: Adolphe has become engaged, without having seen her, to Eulalie, the daughter of a retired merchant. But at

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 446-447.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 448.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 482.

⁴⁷ See especially the article on *Gavarni*, published in *Essais et Mélanges, Œuvres*, Vol. XXII, p. 184; also the review of Monnier's album, *Récréations*, in *la Caricature*, May 31, 1832. *Œuvres*, Vol. XXII, pp. 203-4.

⁴⁸ Published in *la France dramatique au 19^e siècle*, number 281, 1838.

Paris he has fallen in love with an unknown lady, and wishes to break his pledge to Eulalie's parents. His friend, Albert, agrees to help him, and later, disguised as various members of Adolphe's family, including the famous Prudhomme, he scandalizes the parents of Eulalie, so that they are eager to break off the engagement of their daughter. But Adolphe finally recognizes Eulalie as the fair unknown whom he has seen at Paris, and the farce ends happily. Monnier played with success the rôle of Albert and the improvised family, advertising his advent upon the stage in his final couplet:

Messieurs, jadis, dans une autre carrière,
 Votre indulgence a su me soutenir;
 J'invoque ici votre bonté première:
 Que le passé protège l'avenir!
 Songez, messieurs, sur ce point-là j'insiste,
 Lorsque je brigue un suffrage nouveau,
 Que devant vous c'est toujours un artiste,
 Et qu'il n'a fait que changer de drapeau.

The piece was merely a travesty, but the character of Prudhomme became immensely popular. Who is Prudhomme? He is the symbol of the active, commercial, bourgeois spirit, rising to importance through sheer bluff and bluster; he is the type of the grandiose politician, the stupid and vulgar parvenu, loud of voice, sententious, absurdly eloquent and filled with self-importance. Balzac was enthusiastic over Monnier and his creation. His letters are filled with appreciation of the man's talent as artist and actor. That he should have boldly proposed to confiscate his Prudhomme and transfer the glory of the character to a play of his own making, at the same time referring to its author in the slighting terms cited above, seems preposterous to those who are not aware of the immense vanity and utter assurance of the man. In January of 1840 Monnier's creation was still in his mind, and at this time he audaciously proposed that Monnier himself should have the principal rôle in this new *Prudhomme*!⁴⁹ Three years later, it is still a question of Monnier. In a letter dated February 10, 1844, Balzac writes to Mme Hanska:

Hier, j'ai rencontré Poirson, le directeur du Gymnase, dans un omnibus, et je crois que je vais arranger avec lui la comédie de *Prudhomme* [en bonne fortune], en la faisant jouer par Henry Monnier. C'est une de mes deux béquilles pour cette année que cette pièce-là. J'irai la lui exposer lundi prochain, et, si cela lui va, je me mets à la faire immédiatement, pour être jouée en mars ou mai, car mars m'a été deux fois fatal!⁵⁰

⁴⁹ *LEt.*, Vol. I, p. 526. January 20, 1840.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, Vol. II, p. 304.

The last line refers of course to the unhappy productions of *Vautrin* and *Quinola*, both played in the month of March. In March, Poirson had accepted the comedy, and rehearsals were to begin.⁵¹ The rôle of Prudhomme was to be taken by the actor Dufour. However, the next month his Prudhomme projects were definitely abandoned,⁵² when Balzac turned his attention from Monnier to Frédérick Lemaître.

In the month of November, 1843, Balzac returned from Russia, the failure of *Pamêla Giraud* fresh in his mind. The importance of his considerable dramatic activity at this time lies in the fact that he was writing solely for a special actor, Frédérick Lemaître.⁵³ In 1842, Lemaître returned to the Porte-Saint-Martin, newly opened under the directorship of the Cogniard brothers, in *Ruy Blas*. The same year he played a gloomy melodrama by Bouchardy, called *Pâris le Bohémien*, and Adolphe Dumas' *Mlle de la Vallière*.⁵⁴ Since *Vautrin* Balzac had been eager for Lemaître's collaboration in a dramatic success. *Richard Cœur-d'éponge* had been written for him; with Monnier and Saint-Firmin he was to have had one of the principal rôles in *l'École des ménages*.⁵⁵ On November 7, 1843, he writes to Mme Hanska that he must prepare a play for Frédérick Lemaître. This play was the result of reading Cooper's *Spy*:

Le drame que je vais faire pour Frédérick aura pour base le rôle de l'espion dans le roman de Cooper; il s'adapte à merveille au talent de l'acteur, qui veut des métamorphoses, et il y a là matière à sentiments patriotiques qui manquent rarement leur effet sur le public. Mais le danger est dans l'intrigue secondaire, sur laquelle il faut attacher le rôle de l'espion.⁵⁶

The title of this production was to be *le Héros ignoré*, and Lemaître was to play the part of Harvey Birch.⁵⁷ At the beginning of the next year the play was still unwritten, nor was it ever begun, for Balzac was informed by the actor that he had already seen two productions based on the same subject—one, the work of D'Epagny, had failed

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 314, 325.

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 347. Monnier's successful comedy in five acts, entitled *Grandeur et décadence de M. Joseph Prudhomme*, written in collaboration with Gustave Vaez, was given for the first time at the Odéon on November 23, 1852, Monnier himself playing the title rôle.

⁵³ Antoine-Louis-Prosper Lemaître (1800-1876).

⁵⁴ G. Duval, *Frédérick Lemaître et son temps*, 1876.

⁵⁵ Gérard was written for Lemaître, and Duval for Monnier. See *Corr.*, p. 326.

⁵⁶ *LEt.*, Vol. II, p. 229. November 22, 1843.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 244. December 16, 1843.

at the Odéon.⁵⁸ In the meanwhile, Balzac was busily engaged with his comedy, *Mercadet*. Lemaître was achieving a triumph with *les Mystères de Paris*, and Sue's success would not let him rest. *Mercadet* was finished, but it suited neither the theatre for which it was destined nor the actor. On March 13, he writes to Mme Hanska:

J'ai trouvé le plus beau sujet bouffon pour Frédéric, quelque chose d'inouï; mais je n'ai pas le temps de l'écrire. Voici ce que c'est: peindre *les Trainards de l'Armée française*, en 1813 et 1814, c'est-à-dire l'envers de la guerre, toutes les guenilles qui traînent après une armée. Faire une pièce qui soit à l'époque de Napoléon ce qu'est *Don Quichotte* à la chevalerie, montrer les Sganarelles; les Frontins, les Mascarilles, les Figaros de l'armée, ce qu'on appelle *les Fricoteurs*, les gens qui parlent guerre et qui n'ont pas vu le feu, en quinze ans, et qui sont poursuivis, ou par l'ennemi ou par la gendarmerie, de l'armée de Russie en Alsace, en passant par les pays intermédiaires qu'on peindra! C'est une épopée drolatique, et avec Frédéric pour Achille en haillons de gloire, il y a de quoi faire bien de l'argent. . . . J'irai voir demain Gozlan; c'est le seul esprit capable d'inventer l'esprit de ces farces-là. J'ai à lui proposer aussi d'écrire une belle comédie pour le Théâtre-Français.⁵⁹

The "belle comédie" was *Mercadet*. As for *les Trainards*, the title is all that remains of this proposed farce.

One fact concerning all this activity is evident: Balzac was disheartened by his three failures upon the stage, and by the cool reception which had greeted his *École des ménages*, still unaccepted. He was confident, however, that safety lay in the choice of a popular actor and a popular form of play, so he clung tenaciously to Lemaître and strove to imitate his most taking rôles. Moreover, he did not hesitate to solicit aid from outside sources. Consequently, we find him seeking collaboration with such varied types of genius as Gautier and Gozlan, groping about haphazard for inspiration from Fenimore Cooper or the contemporary farce. This is a period that one would like to pass over in silence, devoid of any real progress in dramatic ability, and choked with hasty, unfledged projects to win popular favor and money.

Mention must be made of another curious and unfruitful dramatic venture by Balzac. In the Lovenjoul collection is found the title page, list of characters and notes of a play which read as follows:

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 283. January 24, 1843.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 330.

Orgon
Comédie en cinq actes
Personnages

Mme Pernelle, mère d'Orgon.....	MME DESMOUSSEAUX
Orgon.....	MM. SAMSON
Tartuffe.....	PROVOST
Elmire, femme d'Orgon.....	Mlle MARS
Damis, fils d'Orgon.....	
Marianne [fille d'Orgon].....	Mlle BROHAN
Valère [mari de Marianne].....	
Clitandre (sic).....	
Dorine [servante d'Orgon].....	
Laurent [serviteur de Tartuffe].....	M. RÉGNIER
Flipote [servante de Mme Pernelle].....	

Acte Premier

Dorine et Damis. Une scène entre chaque enfant, d'un caractère différent. Une avec la femme, le beau-frère, Mme Pernelle.

Acte II

Co. . . .

Acte III

Acte de Tartuffe

Acte IV

Acte de la révolte

Acte V

Règne de Tartuffe

Sujet

Tous les ennemis du père de famille qui, ayant fait une faute, est tombé dans le mépris. Vieillesse abreuvée de chagrins. La femme devenant maîtresse, allant dans le monde avec sa fille. Le fils dépensier. Le vieillard reste seul. Il n'a plus que sa mère. Ils regrettent, à eux deux, Tartuffe. Ils font venir Laurent et s'enquière de Tartuffe.

Tartuffe reséduit Orgon; il lui dit que ses malheurs viennent de ce qu'il s'est laissé dominer trop, que le pouvoir du père de famille doit être absolu, qu'il est l'image de Dieu sur la terre, que la dissipation de sa femme vient de son irréligion, qu'elle finira par. . . .

In addition to the above fragment, we have also preserved a prose plan of the comedy written in Balzac's hand, and the manuscript of the first act in verse by the hand of another. When this comedy was conceived, we are unable to say. Lovenjoul determines it roughly between 1835 and 1841—the former date marking the actor's Provost's début at the Comédie Française, the latter, Mlle Mar's retirement from the stage.⁶⁰

⁶⁰ See article by Lovenjoul in *le Figaro*, May 21, 1899.

After his scenario was written, Balzac was anxious to put his comedy into verse, a form which he doubtless regarded necessary for his classic subject. For this task a collaborator was sought, though it was not until 1847 that the busy playwright occupied himself seriously with the task. On June 25 of this year he writes to Mme Hanska:

Si je fais du théâtre, j'aurai beaucoup de courses à faire. Je pense beaucoup à faire *Orgon*, et demain je verrai Théophile Gautier, mon voisin, pour savoir s'il veut mettre ma prose en vers.⁶¹

The next day, however, Balzac writes that Gautier is too busy to help him:

Alors, j'ai eu l'idée de donner un acte à Charles de Bernard, deux actes à Méry, et de distribuer les deux autres à deux autres poètes, comme Gramont, etc., si ce projet de mon esprit subsiste; car j'ai l'expérience qu'avant de mordre à son œuvre, ma tête lutine avec des sujets.⁶²

By June 28 he had found a poet who was willing to aid him with his versifying:

J'ai découvert un rimeur effréné pour *Orgon*. J'ai mis du monde à sa piste. Il se nomme Amédée Pommier. Quels *fruits* en retirerai-je? l'évènement le dira. . .⁶³

Balzac's acquaintanceship with Pommier was of some years standing. In 1842, the novelist had received a flattering mention in a volume of verse by Pommier entitled *Crâneries et dettes de cœur*,⁶⁴ and had written a cordial letter to the poet in reply.⁶⁵ Before the

⁶¹ Cited by Lovenjoul in article *supra*.

⁶² *Ibid.*

⁶³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴ *Corr.*, pp. 350 and 362. Amédée Pommier: Lyons, 1804—Paris, 1877.

⁶⁵ "A M. Amédée Pommier, homme de lettres, à Paris.

23 avril, 1842.

"Monsieur,

"Je vous remercie et de votre recueil et de ce que vous y dites de flatteur pour moi; malgré la modestie de votre lettre d'envoi, j'ai lu tout, et je vous trouve trop de talent et d'avenir pour ne pas vous dire d'écouter ce que vous vous êtes adressé à vous-même par la bouche de Boileau.*

"J'aurais, en qualité d'admirateur presque enthousiaste des poètes, beaucoup d'observations à vous faire, dans votre intérêt; mais je n'ai point le temps de les écrire, hâté que je suis de tracer, comme un pauvre bœuf de prosateur, mon sillon tous les jours; mais, si je me trouve un matin de bonne heure vers le quartier où vous demeurez, j'irai frapper à votre porte et vous soumettre de vive voix mes critiques amicales.

"Agréez, monsieur, mes compliments et mes vœux pour de nouveaux succès. H. de Balzac."—Cited by Lovenjoul in article *supra*.

* Poem entitled *Apparition*.

first of July, 1847, Balzac had submitted his prose plan to Pommier, and the latter had undertaken the collaboration. In September, Balzac went to Russia, and it was during the months of July and August that Pommier put into verse the first act of *Orgon*, following with exactitude, so Lovenjoul tells us, the plan submitted by Balzac. This one act is all that was ever completed. Lovenjoul has published the only fragment of the play which we have in Balzac's hand, the prose plan which he originally conceived.⁶⁶

What Balzac has proposed to do is no less a task than to resume the history of Tartuffe at the point where Molière has left off: to depict the distress of Orgon after the departure of his "directeur de conscience," humiliated by his family, and determined to have Tartuffe back. Nothing more ambitious or preposterous can be imagined than this project suggested by Molière's play, or than the method of composition which Balzac proposed to follow.

Orgon, when finished, was to have been submitted to the actors of the Comédie Française. At the same time Balzac was planning two other plays, one of which was *la Marâtre*, to which the author refers as "un gros mélodrame."⁶⁷ After the opening of the Théâtre Historique on February 20, 1847 with Dumas' *Reine Margot*, Balzac was as eager as ever to compete with the dramatist who was then the idol of all Paris.⁶⁸ The theatre was under the directorship of H. Hostein, former "régisseur général" of the Ambigu-Comique. In August of that year Balzac confided to Hostein that he had planned for a long time a historical drama with the title of *Pierre et Catherine*. The interview is recounted by Hostein as follows:

Nous sommes, dit Balzac, dans une auberge russe. Vous voyez d'ici le décor? Bon. Dans cette auberge, beaucoup de mouvement, parce qu'il y a sur la route des passages de troupes. On entre, on sort, on boit, on cause, mais tout cela très rapidement.

Parmi les gens de la maison, une servante, jeune, vive, alerte. Faites attention à cette femme-là! . . . Elle est bien campée, pas de beauté, mais un piquant exceptionnel! On la lutine en passant: elle sourit à tout le monde: mais ceux dont les propos ou les gestes sont trop vifs trouvent vite à qui parler.

Entre un soldat plus crâne que les autres et qui semble moins pressé. Il cause longuement avec la servante, la fait asseoir près de lui et veut trinquer avec elle.

⁶⁶ Article cited *supra*. For this prose plan, see Appendix. On May 21, 1899, on the occasion of the Balzac centenary, the first and only performance of Pommier's fragment was given by the Comédie Française company.

⁶⁷ Cited by Lovenjoul in article *supra*.

⁶⁸ See Hostein, *Historiettes et souvenirs d'un homme de théâtre*, 1878. 'Also, Henri Beaulieu, *Théâtre du boulevard du crime*, 1905, pp. 155-158.

Comme le vieux hôtelier fait mine de se fâcher, le soldat se lève avec fureur, et, frappant du poing la table: "Qu'on ne s'oppose pas à ma volonté, sinon je mets le feu à la baraque!"

L'hôtelier fait signe à la jeune fille d'obéir. Que voulez-vous? lorsque les troupes sont déchaînées dans les campagnes, le pauvre paysan est bien en peine!

Le soldat s'est remis à table. Il continue à boire et à courtiser la fille, qui sourit à ses propos. "Va, lui dit-il, tu ne seras pas malheureuse avec moi. Je te donnerai une bien plus belle cabane que celle-ci."

Tandis qu'ils causent tous les deux, sans s'occuper d'autre chose, la porte du fond s'ouvre. Un officier paraît. En le voyant, chacun se lève avec respect. Seuls le soldat et la servante demeurent assis. Ils n'ont ni vu ni entendu l'officier, qui s'avance vers la table, et, posant lourdement la main sur l'épaule du soldat, lui crie: "Debout, drôle! Va écrire sur le comptoir ton nom, celui de ton régiment, ton numéro d'ordre, et attends-toi à avoir bientôt de mes nouvelles!"

Le soldat se dresse automatiquement, fait le salut militaire, et va inscrire au comptoir ce que lui a été demandé. Ayant écrit, il présente humblement le papier.

"C'est bon, dit l'officier, va-t'en!"

Le soldat fait un nouveau salut, tourne sur ses talons selon l'ordonnance, et sort sans regarder personne, pas même la jolie fille.

Mais déjà l'officier a pris la place qu'occupait le soldat; assise à ses côtés, la servante écoute ses galants propos.

Un étranger se montre à la porte d'entrée. Il est enveloppé dans un grand manteau. A sa vue, hommes et femmes tombent à genoux. Quelques-uns inclinent leur front jusqu'à terre.

Pas plus que n'avait fait le soldat, l'officier ne remarque pas ce qui se passe derrière lui. La séduisante fille d'auberge est en train de l'ensorceler. Il s'écrie dans un moment d'enthousiasme: "Tu es divine, je t'emmène. Tu auras un bel appartement où il fait très chaud."

Cependant l'homme au manteau s'est approché; rejetant son manteau en arrière et croisant ses bras sur sa poitrine, il se montre à l'officier. L'officier pâlit, se lève, s'inclinant très bas, il balbutie ces mots:

"Ah! pardon, Sire!"

"Relève-toi."

De même encore que le soldat, l'officier se lève tout d'une pièce, attendant le bon plaisir du maître. Le maître était occupé à regarder de près la servante; de son côté, elle considérait avec attention et sans trembler le tzar tout-puissant.

"Tu peux te retirer, dit celui-ci à l'officier. Je garde cette femme, je lui donnerai un palais!"

Ainsi se rencontrèrent pour la première fois Pierre I^{er} et celle qui devint Catherine de Russie! . . .

"Eh bien, que dites-vous de mon prologue?" demanda Balzac.

"Très curieux, très original! mais le reste?"

"Sous peu, vous l'aurez. La donnée est intéressante, vous verrez!" . . .

Although the scenario which Balzac sketched for Hostein is far from complete, we are struck by the insistence of the dramatist upon realistic detail, both in the setting and in the characterization. In

fact, it was a lack of historical information about customs, costumes, landscapes and the like, all of which he had determined to have in keeping with his subject, that detained him. He contemplated a visit to Russia, where he intended to finish his play, and his visit to Wierchowonia was actually made in the autumn of 1847, when he remained as Mme Hanska's guest for over four months. But the play was never finished. *La Marâtre*, produced on May 25, 1848, preceded only a few days the socialist uprising of June, and the lean theatrical days to follow. During the insurrection of June, Balzac wrote the following letter to Hostein, the last word we have about his Russian drama:

Je me demande si, après la bataille des prolétaires, après cette funeste affaire, et alors que les théâtres vont être privés de spectateurs pendant trois mois, je dois continuer à travailler à mon drame de *Pierre et Catherine*. Il me serait indifférent de risquer une pièce comme on en peut trouver à tout moment; mais ce drame est plus qu'une pièce. C'est un sujet, une de ces rencontres qu'on ne fait pas deux fois, comme les *Napoléon* du Cirque. Si vous pensez que les circonstances politiques vous permettront de monter *Pierre et Catherine* en octobre, je viendrai l'achever à Paris, et je quitterai les châteaux où je suis comme un coq en pâte. En attendant, on pourra donner au théâtre des bouffonneries sans amertume, comme les *Macaires*, et incliner aux *Salimbanques*.⁶⁹

After the unprofitable days of June, the theatres began to regain courage and to search about for new material. Alexandre Mauzin, who had been recently appointed director of the Odéon, made an offer to Dumas, Hugo and Balzac of six thousand francs each if they would furnish his theatre with a play apiece. Dumas, we are told, proposed that his son should write a Faust; Hugo declined outright, but Balzac accepted the offer with the promise of a drama to be called *Richard Sauvage*, of which he composed solely one monologue.⁷⁰ In August of the same year it was a question of a five-act comedy for the Théâtre Français, to be called *les Petits Bourgeois*.⁷¹ Not a line of the text was written, although the title and the list of characters are to be found in the Chantilly collection.

⁶⁹ Fragment of a letter to Hostein, published in *le Gaulois*, December 13, 1869. See Lovenjoul, *Histoire des œuvres*, p. 224.

⁷⁰ *Histoire administrative, anecdotique et littéraire du Théâtre-Français*, by P. Porel and G. Monval, 1882, Vol. II, p. 291.

⁷¹ See Hippolyte Rolle in *le Constitutionnel*, August 8, 1848; also Balzac's letter to Rolle, *Corr.*, p. 572. The posthumous novel, *les Petits Bourgeois*, unfinished by Balzac, appeared first in *le Pays*, in 1854. See Lovenjoul, *Histoire des œuvres*, p. 143.

In September of the same year Balzac went to Russia, entrusting his dramatic interests to his friend, Laurent-Jan. During this period negotiations with the Théâtre Français and the Théâtre Historique for *Mercadet* were going on. Balzac was at the same time sketching another play, and writes to his sister in January 1849 that *le Roi des mendiants*, for Hostein, is being completed, "une pièce de circonstance en république et flatteuse pour la majesté populaire."⁷² Laurent-Jan urged Balzac to send this play or some other as soon as possible, and wrote despairingly of the actual condition of the stage.⁷³ By April, according to the author's own word, *le Roi des mendiants* was finished, as well as a play for the Théâtre Historique with a principal rôle for Mme Dorval,⁷⁴ a rôle which she was never to see, since the actress died in May of the same year. As for *le Roi des mendiants*, it was never sent to Paris, Balzac arguing that it was well-nigh impossible to forward a manuscript across the Russian frontier.

In spite of an illness which was soon to carry him to his grave, Balzac still continued to write for the stage, talking bravely of embarking again in his "galère dramatique."⁷⁵ In the month of May 1850, he returned from Russia and his brief honeymoon in Germany. He was in wretched health, and unable to work. Still his mind was occupied with his plays. Arsène Houssaye, at that time director of the Théâtre Français, publishes in his *Confessions* a letter which he received from Balzac shortly after his return:

Mon cher directeur,
J'arrive de Russie. Venez me voir ces jours-ci pour causer de mon théâtre. Dans mon esprit, la Comédie Française doit être le couronnement de ma Comédie humaine. Mes voyages m'ont coupé les jambes. Je ne puis aller vous voir.⁷⁶

In the autumn of 1849, Houssaye had written to Balzac, requesting a drama or a comedy, and was eager to produce something from his pen. It is significant that these last days of a literary career such as was Balzac's, marked by such intense labor and immense production, should have been spent, like the early days of his vague and formless essays, in writing for the stage. As he began, so he

⁷² *Corr.*, p. 600.

⁷³ Letter dated March 15, 1849, published by Lovenjoul, *Autour de Honoré de Balzac*, pp. 247-253.

⁷⁴ *Corr.*, pp. 615 and 618.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 642.

⁷⁶ Vol. III, p. 118.

ended his career. On the very day of his death Houssaye recounts how he entered the great man's study, and found on his desk the fragment of a comedy which he had never seen.⁷⁷ The whole period of his literary activity was marked by theatrical ventures; at times, the dramatist's ambition overshadowed that of the novelist. Before approaching those plays which have been actually produced, what conclusions may be drawn from the mass of scenic projects already traced?⁷⁸

One fact is evident: during Balzac's long novelistic career, he had many ideas for plays; but these ideas, in general, were not of great value, and were not developed. That he produced nothing from the mass of vaudevilles, farces and light comedies whose history has been traced in the present chapter, is undoubtedly, first of all, because he lacked the time to devote to them. Again, Balzac, in spite of his ephemeral enthusiasm, quickly perceived the mediocrity of these scenic plans and partially completed sketches, and found nothing worthy of his genius in them. There was little sincerity in the attack of a vaudeville like *Prudhomme bigame* by the novelist who had just completed *le Père Goriot*; little enthusiasm in the creator of Lucien de Rubempré when he shifted his energies to a Cooper melodrama.

Before seeking to draw further conclusions, let us turn to the more serious dramatic productions of Balzac, and endeavor to establish the extent of their importance in the field of his activity.

⁷⁷ Vol. IV, p. 225.

⁷⁸ Armand Baschet, in *le Mousquetaire*, March 17, 1854, has published the list of proposed plays, including *l'École des ménages* and *Mercadet*, which were actually written, from a document which Balzac himself drew up. This list reads as follows:

<i>L'École des ménages</i>	<i>La Succession Pons</i>
<i>Richard Cœur-d'éponge</i>	<i>L'Éducation du Prince</i>
<i>La Comédie de l'amour</i>	<i>Les Courtisans</i>
<i>Les Petits Bourgeois</i>	<i>Le Ministre</i>
<i>La Conspiration Prud'homme</i>	<i>Orgon</i>
<i>La Folle Épreuve</i>	<i>L'Armée roulante</i>
<i>Le Roi des mendiants</i>	<i>Sophie Prud'homme</i>
<i>Le Mariage Prud'homme</i>	<i>Annunciata</i>
<i>Le Père prodigue</i>	<i>La Veille et le lendemain</i>
<i>Pierre et Catherine</i>	<i>Gobseck</i>
<i>Mercadet</i>	<i>La Fille et la femme</i>

III

L'ÉCOLE DES MÉNAGES

During Balzac's lifetime, and, in fact, after his death, *l'École des ménages* never found its way into any theatrical repertory, nor has it been included in any edition of the author's works. Its preservation and subsequent publication¹ are due to the efforts of the late Viscount de Spoelberch de Lovenjoul, who found in 1878 the only known copy of the play. It had been advertised for sale in a book-catalogue of the Librairie Bailieu at Paris as follows:

Exemplaire unique, avec les corrections de l'auteur et s'arrêtant à la scène V du 5^e acte. Cette pièce fut abandonnée par Balzac, qui plus tard en reprit quelques scènes qu'il adapta à la comédie de *Mercadet*.

Comparing his purchase later with the manuscript copy belonging to Mme de Balzac, Lovenjoul found the play complete, and that no fragment had been utilized in *Mercadet*.

To Lovenjoul also belongs the sole credit for a comprehensive and extremely interesting history of the play, the essay appearing first in *le Figaro*, September 11 to 16, 1895, and afterwards incorporated in his volume entitled *Autour de Honoré de Balzac*, pages 91 to 95. Briefly, this history is as follows:

Planned as early as 1837,² it was during the summer of 1838 that the play, successively called *la Première Demoiselle*, *la Demoiselle du magasin*, and finally *l'École des ménages*, was written. We are told that Balzac took a certain young poet named Lassailly³ into his employ to help with the composition. It was at this moment that his theatrical activity had reached its most feverish stage. His Sardinian mine scheme had failed, and the disappointed prospector

¹ Honoré de Balzac, Œuvre posthume, *l'École des ménages*. Tragédie bourgeoise en cinq actes et en prose, précédée d'une lettre par le Vicomte de Spoelberch de Lovenjoul. Édition originale. . . . Paris. L. Carteret, 1907.

See G. Vicaire in *le Bulletin de bibliophile*, 1907, pp. 296, 297; also, J. Claretie in *le Temps*, March 29, 1907.

² *LEt.*, Vol. I, pp. 381, 382. February 12, 1837.

³ An amusing account of Lassailly's sojourn at les Jardies is told by Gozlan in his volume entitled *Balzac en panouffles*, 1865, pp. 66-74. See also Gérard de Nerval's article in *la Presse*, October 7, 1850, the greater part of which has been cited by Lovenjoul, *Autour de Honoré de Balzac*, pp. 179-191.

was in the most pressing financial straits. To Mme Zulma Carraud he writes in July:

Je mène de front à la fois le théâtre et la librairie, le drame et le livre. . . . Quoique je sois étreint par une nécessité qui n'a jamais desserré un seul bouton de sa camisole d'acier depuis ma naissance, j'ai plus que jamais foi dans mon travail; j'ai promesse de vingt mille francs d'un théâtre pour la pièce que je fais, et je vais organiser mes travaux dramatiques sur la plus grande échelle, car là désormais est la recette. Les livres ne donnent plus rien.⁴

On November 8, 1838, the Théâtre de la Renaissance opened with *Ruy Blas*, Frédérick Lemaître playing the title rôle. The director, Anténor Joly, wished a play of Balzac to follow Hugo's. Armand Pérémé, a well-known antiquarian whom Balzac had met in Berry, seems to have acted as an intermediary between the dramatist and the director, Joly. In a letter from Pérémé, dated December 9, 1838, Balzac was assured by the Renaissance of sixteen thousand francs for his play, and the writer says: "Le théâtre a besoin de vous et il ne saurait trop faire pour obtenir votre assistance."⁵ Balzac replied that he would prepare not one, but three five-act plays for the Renaissance, to be completed within a year's time.⁶ In the same letter to Pérémé he writes that rehearsals for his "drame de la vie bourgeoise" can probably begin in January, 1838.

The play was finally rejected by the Renaissance for Dumas' *Alchimiste*, the latter produced on April 10, 1839. With bitterness the author wrote to Mme Carraud from Les Jardies in March:

La Renaissance m'avait promis six mille francs de prime pour lui faire une pièce en cinq actes; Pérémé avait été l'entremetteur, tout était convenu. Comme il me fallait six mille francs à la fin de février, je me mets à l'œuvre, je passe seize nuits et seize jours au travail, ne dormant que trois heures sur les vingt-quatre; j'emploie vingt ouvriers à l'imprimerie, et j'arrive à écrire, faire et composer *l'École des ménages*, en cinq actes, et à pouvoir la lire le 25 février. Mes directeurs n'avaient pas d'argent, ou peut-être Dumas, qui leur avait fait faux bond et avec lequel ils s'étaient fâchés, leur est-il revenu; ils n'écoutent pas ma pièce et la refusent. Ainsi me voilà échiné de travail, seize jours de perdus, six mille francs à payer, et rien! Ce coup m'a abattu, je n'en suis pas encore remis. Ma carrière au théâtre aura les mêmes événements que ma carrière littéraire; ma première œuvre sera refusée. Il faut un courage sur-humain pour ces terribles ouragans de malheur.⁷

⁴ *Corr.*, p. 306.

⁵ *Autour de Honoré de Balzac*, p. 122.

⁶ Letter dated December 11, 1838.

⁷ *Corr.*, p. 327. After the posthumous performance of *Mercadet*, arranged by the dramatist, D'Ennery, *l'École des ménages* was also submitted to him for a reworking, but the task was refused. The first performance of the play occurred on March 13, 1910, at the Odéon, when the Lovenjoul text was produced along with *la Manette Salomon* of Edmond de Goncourt and *le Candidat* of Flaubert.

The action of the play takes place in the home of a certain M. Gérard, the head of a prosperous business firm. This man, past his fiftieth year and the father of two grown daughters, has formed a violent attachment for the chief clerk in his establishment, Mlle Adrienne Guérin. His conduct has been noticed by all the members of his family, even by the servants, who gossip openly about their master's bounty to the girl. Moreover, Gérard has determined to marry his daughter, Caroline, secretly in love with a young clerk named Hippolyte, to Adrienne's brother, an alliance which the family considers to be far beneath them. Mme Gérard's brother, a wealthy druggist named Duval, foreseeing the disastrous consequences of the old man's affair, promises Roblot, the worthy cashier of the firm, to set him up in a splendid banking business if he will obtain the hand of Mlle Adrienne and marry her. At the opening of the play we see Roblot making an early morning declaration of love to the chief clerk, but he is unsuccessful in his suit. It is then that Mme Gérard and her daughters, in wait for some excuse to expel the girl, accuse her of a love-affair with Roblot, and order her to leave the house. Gérard arrives, and learns that Adrienne has departed, and that the reason for her dismissal has been a plot instigated by Duval. Heaping vulgar reproaches upon his family, he vows to fetch her back, and the truth of his terrible passion dawns upon his wife. She realizes now that the girl must be taken into her confidence. Adrienne returns, and confesses to Mme Gérard how her employer's attentions have been directed towards her for eight years, how he has made certain advances to her, and how she has returned his love. She confesses moreover that her love amounts to a dangerous passion which she may be able to combat within his home, and begs that she may be allowed to stay only until peace is restored, promising to aid Mme Gérard in bringing to his senses the head of the family, and in breaking off the marriage of Caroline to her brother. Adrienne tries with all sincerity to prevent Gérard from insisting upon this alliance, but she fails. Whereupon Mme Gérard, imagining that she has been deceitful, seeks to harm her again, and to excite the jealousy of the husband. Gérard's fury is consequently aroused to white heat: he pretends to have failed in business, to have ruined his firm, urging Roblot again to sue for the hand of the girl merely to observe the effect which these things may have upon her. Adrienne, discovering this treachery, is still generous, returning to Gérard all the money that he has

given her, and seeking again to fulfill her promises to Mme Gérard. Gaining Gérard's consent to the marriage of Caroline and her lover Hippolyte, she excuses his offensive suspicion against her, and begs him to remain a dutiful father. In the meanwhile, other more serious events have been taking place. Caroline, despondent over the outcome of her love-affair, attempts to end her life with poison, while Anna, Gérard's younger daughter, determines to sacrifice herself in order to save her mother and sister from ruin. She attempts to poison Adrienne with arsenic. The plot fails, and Gérard becomes aware of what has occurred. Assuming the rôle of judge, he calls together his family, and discovers to what a terrible pass his illicit love has brought him. With terrific force the truth bursts upon him, and with it his reason flees. But the sight of her demented lover deprives Adrienne as well of her reason, and we finally see the two unfortunate creatures housed under the same roof, meeting each other daily, and talking together of their former love without a sign of mutual recognition. Before a board appointed to look into their affairs, they are brought together, Adrienne pitifully dressed as a bride and calling incessantly for her lover; Gérard dressed in the finery of a young gallant. Caroline, seeing what proofs of love and self-denial Adrienne's brother has given her, and renounced by the faithless Hippolyte, consents to become his wife. With this scene the sombre drama closes, and the unhappy family is left to piece together the wreck which the ravages of passion have left within it.

A reading of the play reveals the fact that the action is exceedingly complicated and, at times, obscure. The author has not brought into relief the successive steps of his intrigue, and the play is overloaded with scenes which are not only too long, but which follow one another with little natural sequence. The action, moreover, is complicated by a series of conspiracies and misunderstandings. First, Mme Gérard and her brother conspire to expel Adrienne from the home; later Mme Gérard sees the necessity of forming an alliance with the girl, and begs her to return. Finally, when Adrienne's sincere endeavors to restore peace have failed, Mme Gérard tries again to harm her. These are the three successive steps which Balzac has sought to put into action, but a host of secondary complications intervene. Gérard is deceived about the reason for Adrienne's

departure from his home; he is unable to assure himself of her honesty even after her return. His wife's pretended affection for the girl deceives him, as well as Adrienne's sincere efforts to have him consent to Caroline's marriage to Hippolyte. These misunderstandings succeed one another with little logical order, and serve to befog the action to a serious extent. The whole of the long second act is taken up with Gérard's attempts to outwit his family, closing with a scene of pure "comédie larmoyante" between the two daughters, which adds nothing to the action. In the third act further awkward complications arise from Gérard's pretended failure, while the opening of the fourth act announces his departure, a scene for which the way has not been prepared. Also, in this act the element of chance intervenes in a most startling manner, with no semblance of reality. Just at the moment when Duval declares that Caroline has stolen arsenic from his shop, with the intention of killing herself, a dog eats the poisoned soup prepared for Adrienne by Anna! The fifth act is misplaced, since it has little logical connection with the preceding action. The double catastrophe is not prepared, and is merely a violent theatrical device for bringing the action to a close.⁸

The unity of composition is furthermore disturbed by long monologues and unnecessary tirades which retard the action: for example, Gérard's lengthy opening monologue at the beginning of the second act, and his review of his life in the fourth act.

Throughout the play we are struck by the evidences of careless work and the lack of dramatic technique. The action develops haltingly, and is overburdened with useless scenes. The conclusion, which should be the logical working out and summing up of the different threads of the action, is utterly without significance. The most fundamental of all theatrical gifts—the concentration of effect in scenes which follow in logical progression—Balzac did not possess at the time of the composition of this play.

In the characters which Balzac has introduced into this dramatic frame we have the manifestations of a powerful imagination unbridled, the same imagination which led the novelist at times to abuse reality, and to produce such excessive types as are to be found in *le Père Goriot* or *la Cousine Bette*. Tolerated in the novel, where

⁸ Jules Claretie, in *le Temps*, March 29, 1907, suggests that this final "mad scene" was written, in part, at least, by Lassailly.

they may develop slowly, and where the author may devote pages to personal description, these characters are wholly inadmissible on the stage. Balzac was no doubt aware of the poverty of analysis in this play when, in writing to Mme Hanska, who had criticized his drama rather harshly, he stated that "peut-être les personnages manquent-ils de certaines conditions pour devenir types."⁹

Balzac has grouped his personages into two opposing camps: the one, Gérard's family—his wife and daughters, and his wife's brother—and the other, Gérard himself and Adrienne. In this latter group Adrienne's brother may also be placed, since the efforts of Mme Gérard to break off his attachment for her daughter constitute one of the threads of the action.

Let us examine first the Gérard family. Mme Gérard and her daughter Caroline are gloomy, colorless creatures, hopelessly under the domination of Gérard, whose will they have learned to obey. Caroline later shifts from the pale, melancholy girl, bereft of the man she loves, and attempting to take her own life, to a modest little miss, resigning herself eventually to the man who has shown his devotion to her throughout. With Anna, the younger daughter, it is different. She is a precocious woman of sixteen! "Je ne suis comme ma sœur qui pleure et obéit, J'ai mes idées," she declares.¹⁰ It has been her unhappy lot to observe the ignominy and danger of her father's senile passion, and she determines to outwit Adrienne for the sake of her mother and sister. Balzac has made of Anna the best character in the play. She is no longer the "jeune fille de convention," but a woman of spirit and resolution. She is a champion of woman's rights, who talks with the experience of a mature person. To save her sister from a man she does not love, Anna offers to marry him instead.

Anna: Mon père, une jeune fille peut-elle s'offrir elle-même en mariage à un homme?

Gérard: Ce n'est pas l'usage.

Anna: Hé bien, proposez-moi vous-même à monsieur. Ma sœur croit qu'il faut bien aimer un homme pour l'épouser; moi, je crois que l'amour nous rend très malheureux, et comme vous avez dit que le mariage n'était pas fondé sur la passion, le bonheur conjugal de monsieur reposerait sur des bases solides.

Gérard: Est-ce que tu es en état de juger le mariage?

Anna: Le mariage! Mais c'est un sacrement institué pour se tourmenter.¹¹

⁹ *LEt.*, Vol. I, p. 506. February 12, 1839.

¹⁰ Act I, scene 8.

¹¹ Act III, scene 14. Compare, *la Peau de chagrin*: "Le mariage est un sacrement en vertu duquel nous ne nous communiquons que des chagrins."—*Œuvres*, Vol. XV, p. 135.

She possesses a sharp wit, and is quite capable of dealing with her father. When Gérard argues with Caroline that intellect is the only stable quality on which to base one's affections, Anna replies: "Papa, si votre système prend, les sots resteront donc sans femmes. Pauvres sots!"¹² On men in general she delivers the following opinion.

Je les trouve tous laids, de gros favoris noirs, des barbes dures, des teints à faire peur! Quand ils sont jolis, ils nous ressemblent, et ils n'ont alors ni esprit, ni capacité Vraiment le monde est à refaire; si je me marie, je ne veux que des garçons, afin de ne pas avoir l'ennui des gendres.¹³

Where Balzac has failed in this character is in the exaggeration of her violent loves and hates: they are too apparent and too melodramatic. In spite of these unnatural qualities, however, this figure of a mature, firm and keen-minded girl remains by far the best creation in the play.

In Roblot Balzac has instilled something of his real fervor for gold: this old cashier, whose whole life has been spent pouring over columns of figures and counting money, so that his love-making even is mixed with percentages. The figure is realistic, but episodic, and is overshadowed by grosser and more romantic types of exaggerated passion found in the principal rôles. In like manner, Duval, the richest druggist in the Rue des Lombards, is neatly drawn, but remains in the background. Adrienne's brother, who is meant to fill an important rôle in the action, is but feebly conceived; a character that is sympathetic and romantic, "un avocat qui ne plaide que selon ses convictions, dont la conduite est irréprochable,"^{13a} who later becomes a successful lawyer, and is declared to be "le plus grand avocat du jeune barreau," a living representative of the rising democracy, sincere, honest and dignified.

When we come to study the father of this unhappy family, we are struck first of all by the fact that the type has appeared at various times in Balzac's work, with varying degrees of emphasis laid upon the master-passion. It is sufficient to recall from the Human Comedy such figures as Jean-Jacques Rouget, Nucingen or Baron Hulot. Gérard is but another one of these monomaniacs, devoured by a senile passion. A clever and successful business man, ambitious and thrifty, he has met, at a time of life when the last

¹² Act III, scene 8.

¹³ Act III, scene 14.

^{13a} Act II, scene 5.

flame of love is burning, a woman whose charms turn him from his family, and gradually lead him to ruin:

A la porte de l'enfer terrestre des gens passionnés, et qui s'appelle la vieillesse, a surgi cette jeune fille.¹⁴

He forgets his duties as husband, he is ready to sacrifice his daughter's happiness, he can think of nothing but this passion. The prudent business man who has amassed a fortune becomes careless in his affairs; the devoted father forgets his children, while his violence towards his wife is the common talk of the servants. Vice turns to an obsession, until the old man is torn by jealousy and tortured by fear of infidelity when he is away from Adrienne. To please her, he would even desert his home.

If we compare this stage figure for a moment with a similar character later conceived by Balzac for the Human Comedy, the Baron Hulot of *la Cousine Bette*, we note certain differences, and that, whereas the character in the novel lives and impresses itself upon our memories by the sheer magnitude of its proportions, the stage figure is feeble and unconvincing. Hulot is perhaps one of the most excessive figures that Balzac has drawn; here we have a striking example of a powerful imagination at work, menacing reality. But Hulot, the creation of this excessive imagination, ceases to be an individual, and remains rather a type, a personification of the *sex appetite*. In the novel, the author has had room to expand the character. At the outset, we have a splendid physical portrait of the aged gallant; we see him in the midst of his friends and his family, dignified and respected, while the poisonous germ of lust begins slowly to expand, destroying fortune and honor. We are able to see the passion develop by successive stages: it increases, degree by degree, until it becomes overwhelming in its force. Under its weight the character assumes colossal proportions, until we finally cease to look upon Hulot as a man, but as a symbol of physical and moral decrepitude.

When placed upon the stage, where the presentation must be entrusted to spoken dialogue and to an actor's individual art, such a figure is much less convincing. The dramatist can no longer rely upon physical and psychological description; his character must live by what he says and does. We are concerned here with the living, acting individual, but Gérard's passion has attained heroic propor-

¹⁴ Act IV, scene 2.

tions, and in the crude glare of the footlights it appears ridiculous. Balzac has dwelt with melodramatic insistence upon the brutally pathetic, giving to his hero a tearful language and violent gestures:

Dans la jeunesse, nous aimons avec notre force qui va diminuant; mais, à mon âge, on aime avec la faiblesse qui va croissant; aussi la vie me paraît-elle impossible sans elle. . . . Ils sont tous contre elle, ils veulent l'éprouver. . . . Oh! lâches! Et toi aussi! Mais si elle triomphe, ils sont perdus; et si elle succombe, je deviendrai. . . fou peut-être.¹⁵

Gérard, as passionate lover, as self-appointed judge of his family, as maundering idiot, is created with the express desire of producing physical horror and repulsion, and with little care for psychological exactitude. The conception of the character is admissible and even interesting. A senile and jealous passion which degrades an honorable man unhappily finds correspondence in reality. Balzac knew how to present such a character in his novels; he did not know how to adapt it to the stage. Where he has failed is in his presentation, which is awkward, and renders the character ridiculous.

Adrienne Guérin, who passes in and out the Gérard household with the familiarity of one of the family, reserved and modest in manner, thoughtful to the extent of knowing the individual tastes of each of its members, is also a figure of the melodrama. The power of her passion has lifted her to the sphere of the romantic heroines, with no trait to distinguish her from the thousands of unfortunate women who have made tender-hearted spectators weep in the past. There is nothing to distinguish the declaration of passion which Adrienne makes to her lover's wife from manifold similar avowals:

Mais, madame, ici je suis forte, ici je puis résister, ici je puis vous rendre mille services, empêcher des malheurs, de grands malheurs! Éloignez-moi, nous sommes tous perdus! J'ai bien pensé à fuir par amour pour lui; mais il serait venu me chercher au fond de l'Amérique. Si je reste en France, il ferait des folies! etc., etc.¹⁶

Adrienne, to escape her lover, would flee to America, a place dear to the heart of the melodramatist; America, the refuge of the "gens à passion," of the "révoltés," of all those who seek to avoid the constraining influence of society!

Adrienne is also generous-hearted, and it is by means of generosity that she seeks to purify her passion. Her struggles are depicted

¹⁵ Act IV, scene 2.

¹⁶ Act III, scene 4.

with the sole purpose of making a boulevard audience weep. In one of her romantic outbursts she cries to Mme Gérard:

Infâme, je vous aurais ruinée. Vous ne savez pas, Madame, jusqu'où va cette passion; elle s'agrandit de toute la faiblesse qui de jour en jour croît chez lui. Je n'envisage pas l'avenir sans effroi. J'aime, je combats! Mais c'est tout ce que peuvent demander le monde et Dieu.¹⁷

When she learns of Gérard's pretended failure, and believes him generous in offering Roblot to her, she exclaims, almost in Doña Sol's very language: "Quand une femme aime un bandit, elle va dans les cavernes!"¹⁸ Generosity, she cries, is "la première vertu des hommes envers les femmes."¹⁹

In February of 1837, Balzac writes the following interesting lines to Mme Hanska:

Je fais en ce moment avec fureur une pièce de théâtre, car là est mon salut. Il faut vivre du théâtre et de ma prose concurremment. Elle s'appelle: *la Première Demoiselle*. Je l'ai choisie, pour mon début, parce qu'elle est entièrement bourgeoise. Figurez-vous une maison de la rue Saint-Denis, comme *la Maison du Chal qui pelote*, où je mettrai un intérêt dramatique et tragique d'une extrême violence. Personne n'a encore pensé à mettre à la scène l'adultère du mari, et ma pièce est basée sur cette grave affaire de notre civilisation moderne. Sa maîtresse est dans la maison. Personne n'a encore songé à faire un Tartufe femelle, et sa maîtresse sera Tartufe en jupons; mais on concevra bien plus l'empire de la première demoiselle sur le maître, qu'on ne conçoit celui de Tartufe sur Orgon, car les moyens de domination sont bien plus naturels et compréhensibles.

En regard de ces deux figures passionnées, il y aura une mère opprimée, et deux filles également victimes de la tyrannie perfide de la première demoiselle. L'aînée croit qu'il faut cajoler la première demoiselle, qui a son parti dans la maison, car le caissier l'aime sincèrement. La tyrannie est si odieuse aux filles et à la mère, que la plus jeune des filles, partant d'un principe d'héroïsme, veut délivrer sa famille de cette peste en s'immolant elle-même. Elle veut l'empoisonner et rien ne l'arrête. Le coup manque, mais le père, qui a vu à quelles extrémités se portent ses enfants, devine que la première demoiselle ne peut vivre sous son toit, qu'après cette tentative tout lien d'intérieur est rompu. Il la renvoie; mais, au cinquième acte, il lui est si impossible de vivre sans cette femme, qu'il prend une portion de sa fortune, laisse le reste à sa femme et s'enfuit avec *la Première Demoiselle* en Amérique.

Voilà le gros de ma pièce; je ne vous parle pas des détails qui sont aussi originaux que le sont les caractères, qui n'ont été, à mon avis, pris pour aucune pièce. Il y a la scène du jugement de la fille en famille; il y a la scène de séparation, etc. . . .²⁰

¹⁷ Act III, scene 4.

¹⁸ Act IV, scene 4.

¹⁹ Act I, scene 12.

²⁰ *LEt.*, Vol. I, pp. 381, 382. February 12, 1837.

This letter is instructive, for it displays to us a character very different from the one realized in the play. In this plan Balzac supposes his heroine to be a female Tartuffe, a hypocritical and less generous character than the one conceived later. It is apparent that he has gone to *Tartuffe* for his heroine, as well as for the main outlines of his plot. The situation is the same in both plays: a bourgeois family into which an impostor has entered, and whose happiness is being sapped out and destroyed inch by inch. The head of the family in each case brings ruin upon his home, and in both plays the family is leagued against him in their efforts to expel the impostor. Balzac, moreover, gives to Gérard a brother-in-law who strives to bring peace into the chaotic household, corresponding to Cléante in Molière's play. As Orgon's maniacal devotion to "le pauvre homme," so Adrienne's name is constantly on Gérard's lips. Like Molière, Balzac has felt the necessity of introducing a few comic scenes in the midst of his tragedy; so Victoire, the impudent and observant maid, bears a certain similarity to Dorine, and serves to relieve the tragic march of events. Just as Orgon, through his blind devotion to the hypocrite, obstructs his daughter's wooing, so Gérard is determined to marry his daughter to Adrienne's brother. If we may trust Gérard de Nerval's recollections of a first reading of Balzac's play, in the original version Gérard's old mother formed an additional member of the family, corresponding to Madame Pernelle in *Tartuffe*.²¹ Just when the changes in the conception and the action of Adrienne's character were made it is impossible to say. The play was reworked a number of times. When the young poet, Lassailly, went to Les Jardies to collaborate with Balzac, the play was entirely rewritten.²² It was probably at this time that the author idealized his female Tartuffe, and purified her passion through generosity, unable to neglect the popular call of theatre-goers who demanded romantic heroines.

Balzac was certainly not unaware of the faults of his play. When the manuscript was turned over to Gustave Planche to read, the author was impressed by the latter's unfavorable verdict:

Planche m'a rapporté ma pièce. Il la trouve au-dessus de tout ce qui se fait, mais nous sommes du même avis sur les défauts. Ramenée au point de vue de l'art, elle en a beaucoup.²³

²¹ See *supra*, p. 37, note 3.

²² *Around Honoré de Balzac*, p. 136.

²³ *LEt.*, Vol. I, p. 509. April 14, 1839.

The awkwardly constructed action and the melodramatic characters reflect a style which contains many defects. The principal one is obscurity: the characters allude to things which the audience cannot possibly know; they employ hidden meanings so that the spectator becomes confused in his attempt to follow the action. The second stylistic fault is no less serious, and consists in the unreality of the dialogue. The idealistic ardor of the characters is reflected in all that they say, and they speak a most unnatural language. Sometimes it is a solemn phrase uttered by Gérard's daughter: "L'amour n'est le plus beau de tous les sentiments que parce qu'il est le plus involontaire."²⁴ Sometimes, it is merely an inartistic and heavy metaphor: "Quand on se sent la tête dans les cieux, la terre fait mal aux pieds."²⁵ Adrienne constantly expresses herself in affected phrases which have little relation to reality. For example, take the following lines addressed to Mme Gérard:

Ici, dans le sanctuaire domestique, j'ai su purifier un amour qui vous blessait. Il y a de la grandeur assez pour aimer purement; aussi, les soupçons l'aigrissent-ils à un point où il ne se connaît plus. . . . Il veut le salaire de la plus coûteuse des vertus²⁶

Roblot, talking with the cook, speaks as follows:

Ordinairement, ma chère, les bienfaiteurs exploitent leurs obligés ou les obligés deviennent les tyrans de leurs bienfaiteurs.²⁷

Gérard either gives vent to long monologues which retard the action or employs such trite and sententious remarks as the following: "Le hasard est le courtisan de la jeunesse."²⁸ Usually, the wit is of a cheap variety, even if sometimes characteristic of the speaker's vulgarity. "Je ne puis pas voir pleurer une femme! Ça trouble ma digestion,"²⁹ says the uncle, Duval. Roblot figures his passion as follows: "Après tout, l'amour est une addition, le mariage une multiplication, et l'arithmétique fait plus de mariages que l'amour n'en défait."³⁰ The pathetic is also stressed to the utmost, and at

²⁴ Act II, scene 10. Compare, *César Birotteau*: "Quelques moralistes pensent que l'amour est la passion la plus involontaire, la plus désintéressée, la moins calculatrice de toutes."

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ Act III, scene 4.

²⁷ Act I, scene 1.

²⁸ Act II, scene 1.

²⁹ Act II, scene 9.

³⁰ Act I, scene 2.

times all reality vanishes before the violence of tumultuous scenes: broken bits of dialogue, entreaties, tears, repetitions of the words "crime" and "poison."

No word of praise can be spoken for the style of this play. It is characterized by obscurity and banality, the faults of many of the popular dramatists of Balzac's day.

Gautier, writing of Balzac's *École des ménages* in *la Presse* March 11, 1839, concludes his article with the following words:

Nous sommes charmés que M. de Balzac aborde enfin le théâtre. Depuis longtemps nous demandons pourquoi la scène est abandonnée aux plates médiocrités. Le plaisir du théâtre n'existe pas à Paris pour les gens qui ont fait leurs études et savent leur langue. Des esprits délicats ne sauraient prendre aucun intérêt aux productions sans esprit, sans étude et sans style des fournisseurs de la denrée dramatique. Que M. Alfred de Musset, le délicieux auteur des *Caprices de Marianne* et le poète de *Lorenzaccio*; que Méry, ce volcan de saillies toujours en éruption; que Mérimée, qui a fait le théâtre de *Clara Gazul*; que Janin, cet esprit d'un enjouement si facile, et d'une plaisanterie si fine et si légère; que George Sand, cette grande passion, s'emparent de la scène, et ne permettent plus aux barbares de s'y montrer! Ce sera là un beau et noble spectacle, et nous louons M. de Balzac d'avoir pris l'initiative.

Briefly, what was the condition of the theatre at the moment Balzac was writing his *École des ménages*? The Monarchy of July had had its important effects upon literature as well as upon politics, and the stage had become a potent means for the diffusion of ideas. All the important political agitations were reflected in the plays of the time. Hosts of playwrights with social and humanitarian theories were filling the theatres with the most mediocre of productions—military travesties and vaudevilles, cheap melodramas which reflected the passing events. An author who wrote under the sinister pseudonym of Samson offered to the public a spectacle of horrors called *le Bourreau*. Melodramas, such as *Robert Macaire*, which rendered crime ludicrous and made a cynical appeal to the most depraved tastes, were much in vogue. It was also the age of Soulié's *Diane de Chivry* and *le Proscrit*, "machines électriques, destinées à donner d'effroyables secousses aux spectateurs;"³¹ of historical travesties such as Pyat's *Ango*. Liberty had given away to licence, and dramatic authors were seeking to please the crudest of public tastes:

Les trois traits dominants de cette littérature dramatique courante furent un penchant marqué à renverser sur la scène la hiérarchie sociale, en donnant l'avantage

³¹ Alfred Nettement, *Histoire de la littérature française sous le gouvernement de Juillet*, 1876. Vol. II, p. 181.

aux dernières classes sur les premières; une hardiesse cynique à tout oser, pour réveiller les sens du public assoupis et blasés à la suite de tant d'excès et de scandales, et une tendance générale à mettre sur le pavois l'habileté souillée, et à préférer le bien-joué à la vertu.³²

So Alfred Nettement, a sound critic of the day, describes the conditions. During all this period, it must be remembered, romanticism and the "dramas de cape et d'épée" were still holding the boards. Hugo, with his national and social mission, his definite dramatic system and moral intent, his "idées sévères," his poetic fancies and lyric outbursts, was still maintaining a vogue. Dumas, moreover, with his pageants and historical dramas, had not yet exhausted his talents. But, towards 1838, lyricism began to decline, and that same year *Ruy Blas* was received with coldness, while the Renaissance theatre began to search for new material.

Something has already been said of Balzac's ideas of the contemporary stage. He was a bitter enemy of the encroaching vaudeville; he scorned the wornout tricks of the romantic school, and the calumnies expressed under the guise of historical dramas. He voiced repeatedly the need of "émotions vraies et fortes,"³³ of depicting with fearlessness the truth upon the stage. Let us see what he has proposed in this first drama.

Balzac calls his first play "une drame de la vie bourgeoise."³⁴ He is in reality continuing the traditions already laid down by Diderot in his *Fils naturel* and his *Père de famille*: he is endeavoring to present a picture of middle-class family life without artistic formalism, and to preach a moral lesson. Following the tradition of the "tragédie bourgeoise," sentimentalism plays a large rôle. The smallest of events are made tragic, while the most tragic of human consequences are multiplied without number. What is the moral lesson which Balzac wishes to preach? He proposes to depict what he considers the most grievous phase of modern life: marriage.³⁵ Marriage is not made the turning-point of the drama, but the central note about which the action revolves: Gérard is unhappily married, and wishes to force an unhappy alliance upon his daughter:

Madame, la manière dont on se marie est un des malheurs de notre temps. Le mariage n'est pas fondé sur la passion . . . mais sur la famille.³⁶

³² *Ibid.*, p. 180.

³³ *Portraits et critique littéraire, Œuvres*, Vol. XXII, p. 19.

³⁴ *LEt.*, Vol. I, p. 506. February 12, 1839.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ Act III, scene 8.

So Gérard addresses his wife. He seeks to give his daughter to a man whom she does not love. To save her sister from the evil consequences of this union, the younger daughter would commit a crime. The play is the study of the ravages of passion which overtake a man past middle life, the father of a family. It is the author's desire to handle with fearlessness and truth this question. "Pour lâcher le *vrai* devant un public blasé, il faut du courage,"³⁷ he writes to Péréme during the negotiations for the acceptance of the play. Balzac's theory is excellent, and he has set out to accomplish something new. Before Augier, he preaches the thesis of respect for family ties; before the younger Dumas he condemns adultery. In certain respects, however, the play approaches the romantic drama rather than the bourgeois tragedy. The mingling of the comic with the emotional, the awkward unfolding of events, the insistence upon a master passion, the pretentious unreality of the characters and the self-renunciation of the heroine which purifies her in the eyes of the world, are all elements dear to the hearts of the Romantics. The result is a hybrid production, half-way between the "*pièce à thèse*" and the "*pièce pathétique*." However sincere Balzac may have been in theory, he has also failed to make his thesis clear. His sympathy is divided between two hostile camps: Gérard and his innamorata are made to suffer as well as his family, while both parties have committed serious faults. In the interest of his thesis the author should have concentrated his sympathy on one or the other side. This he has not done, and the moral value suffers thereby.

L'École des ménages, from the point of view of construction and character study, is a failure. For its author the field of the drama is unfamiliar, and he treads over it with no light step. The interest in the play lies solely in the realistic promise which Balzac, successful in the realm of the novel, makes at the outset of his dramatic career.

³⁷ Letter dated December 11, 1838. Cited in *Autour de Honoré de Balzac*, p. 127.

IV VAUTRIN

Vautrin, a drama in five acts, was represented for the first time at the Théâtre de la Porte-Saint-Martin on March 14th, 1840. The play, one volume in-8, was published first by Delloye and Tresse without the preface, which appeared two months later. This preface, which is dated May 1st, 1840, was heralded by the following detachable notice, published with the volume:

M. de Balzac, retenu au lit par une indisposition très-grave, n'a pu écrire la préface qui devait accompagner sa pièce de *Vautrin*, dont les représentations ont été arrêtées par l'autorité.

Cette préface paraîtra dès que la santé de l'auteur lui permettra de la composer. Toutes les personnes qui auront acheté la présente édition auront droit à un exemplaire de ladite préface, qui leur sera remis en échange du présent avis, qu'il est facile de détacher de ce livre.

BON POUR UN EXEMPLAIRE DE LA PRÉFACE DE VAUTRIN.¹

Balzac had published *le Père Goriot* in 1835. Three years later he had again reincarnated his Vautrin in *la Torpille*.² During all this period we find him intensely busy with scenic projects. The unsuccessful outcome of *l'École des ménages* and its withdrawal from the boards of the Renaissance theatre, April 10th, 1839, urged the despondent dramatist to the fulfilment of another theatrical venture, this time, in a sort of desperation, a play to catch the public favor. Frédéric Lemaître was fresh from his success in *Robert Macaire*.³ The public had read and was thoroughly familiar with the Vautrin of the novels. To hear their applause, to put them in direct contact with a type they already knew, to reach a great mass of people who did not read, to solve pressing financial needs—*Vautrin* was the great adventure.

Théophile Gautier, perhaps with certain fantastic exaggeration, recounts how the drama was conceived:

Un mot pressant de Balzac nous somma un jour de nous rendre à l'instant même rue de Richelieu, 104, où il avait un pied-à-terre dans la maison de Buisson, le tailleur.

—Enfin, voilà le Théo! s'écria-t-il en nous voyant. Paresseux, tardigrade, unau, aï, dépêchez-vous donc; vous devriez être ici depuis une heure.—Je lis demain à Harel un grand drame en cinq actes.

¹ Lovenjoul, *Histoire des œuvres de Balzac*, pp. 221, 222.

² Title under which the first part of *les Splendeurs et misères des courtisanes* appeared.

³ Comedy in three acts, by Benjamin, Saint-Amand, and Maurice Alhoy, played first at les Folies-Dramatiques, June 14, 1834.

—Et vous désirez avoir notre avis, répondîmes-nous en nous établissant dans un fauteuil comme un homme qui se prépare à subir une longue lecture.

A notre attitude, Balzac devina notre pensée, et il nous dit de l'air le plus simple: "Le drame n'est pas fait."

—Diable! fis-je. Et bien, il faut faire remettre la lecture à six semaines.

—Non, nous allons bâcler le *dramorama*, pour toucher la monnaie. A telle époque j'ai une échéance bien chargée.

—D'ici à demain, c'est impossible; on n'aurait pas le temps de le recopier.

—Voici comment j'ai arrangé la chose. Vous ferez un acte, Ourliac un autre, Laurent-Jan le troisième, de Belloy le quatrième, moi le cinquième, et je lirai à midi, comme il est convenu. Un acte de drame n'a pas plus de quatre ou cinq cents lignes; on peut faire cinq cents lignes de dialogue dans sa journée et dans sa nuit.

—Contez-moi le sujet, indiquez-moi le plan, dessinez-moi en quelques mots les personnages, et je vais me mettre à l'œuvre, lui répondis-je passablement effaré.

—Ah! s'écria-t-il avec un air d'accablement superbe et de dédain magnifique, s'il faut vous conter le sujet, nous n'aurons jamais fini! . . .

D'après une indication brève arrachée à grand'peine, nous nous mîmes à brocher une scène dont quelques mots seulement sont restés dans l'œuvre définitive, qui ne fut pas lue le lendemain, comme on peut bien le penser. Nous ignorons ce que firent les autres collaborateurs; mais le seul qui mit sérieusement la main à la pâte, ce fut Laurent-Jan, auquel la pièce est dédiée.⁴

This statement of a contemporary and a friend is satisfactory proof that Balzac was aided somewhat in the composition of the play by Laurent-Jan and by others. Just what was the extent of this assistance we are unable to judge. However, there is no reason to believe with M. Gabriel Ferry that Laurent-Jan composed the greater part of the play.⁵ Balzac was at the time of the composition of *Vautrin* unfamiliar with the exigencies of the stage; his knowledge of plot construction and the handling of situations was limited. Gautier tells us of the unusual collaboration that his friend sought, and that Laurent-Jan interested himself seriously in the play. It is more than likely that Balzac consulted his actor friend regarding the arrangement of scenes, the situations, the comic relief. But there is every reason to assume, from the resemblances between *Vautrin* and the later plays, that the melodramatic plot, the complex situations and the *jeux de mots* are the work of Balzac. The author himself speaks several times of the difficulties he has encountered in the

⁴ *Portraits contemporains*, 1914, pp. 119, 120.

⁵ "Laurent-Jan écrivit la plus grande partie de l'ouvrage; il ne resta que quelques lignes de travail de Gautier."—*Balzac et ses amis*, p. 114.

Ferry is here following the statement made him by Adolphe D'Ennery, the adapter of *Mercadet*. See his article, *Balzac et Adolphe D'Ennery*, in *la Revue d'art dramatique*, July 15, 1894.

composition of the play. To Mme Hanska he writes in February of 1840:

. . . je trouvais ma pièce stupide, et j'avais raison. Je l'ai recommencée en entier et je la trouve passable.

Another time he confesses that the workmanship is quite poor:

. . . ce sera toujours une méchante pièce. J'ai cédé au désir de jeter sur la scène un personnage romanesque, et j'ai eu tort.⁶

The play was accepted by the Porte-Saint-Martin, and on October 30th, 1839 the author writes to Mme Hanska that it has been turned over to the actors.⁷ The idea of dramatic fame from this play was overshadowed by a desire for financial success:

Jugez quelles seront mes angoisses pendant la soirée où *Vautrin* sera représenté. Dans cinq heures de temps, il sera décidé si je paie ou si je ne paie pas mes dettes. . . . Aller vous voir est un désir constant chez moi; mais il faut pour cela ne laisser derrière soi ni billets à payer, ni affaires, ni dettes, ni soucis d'argent, et cela représente au moins soixante mille francs, et *Vautrin* peut les donner en quatre mois!⁸

The first performance of the play occurred on the fourteenth of March, 1840. Balzac, on the eve of the event, sent the following lines to Lamartine, begging him to be present:

Je conçois parfaitement que, chez vous, l'homme politique absorbe l'homme littéraire à ce point que vous ignoriez ce qui se passe dans un petit théâtre de boulevard.

J'aurais donc l'honneur de vous apprendre que je fais jouer demain un drame en cinq actes à la Porte-Saint-Martin.

Si, comme je l'espère, je tombe de bonne heure, je m'empresserai d'aller demander à votre amitié des consolations de circonstance.⁹

To Gozlan he confides:

Vous verrez une chute mémorable. J'ai eu tort d'appeler le public, je crois. *Moriluri te salutant, Cæsar!*¹⁰

The play was a great failure, and the press on the following day was exceedingly hostile. Jules Janin, writes in *les Débats* of March 16th:

Tout manque, l'esprit, le style, le langage, l'invention, le sens commun, and he closes his article with these words:

C'est un lamentable chapitre à ajouter aux égarements de l'esprit humain.

⁶ *LEt.*, Vol. I, p. 529. February, 1840.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 521.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 530. February 10, 1840.

⁹ *Corr.*, p. 338.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 339.

On March 15th, the Minister of the Interior, charging Balzac with immorality, forbade further performances of the play.¹¹ We are familiar with the principal cause of this governmental displeasure. Frédérick Lemaître, who played the rôle of Vautrin, appeared in the fourth act of the play attired in the costume of a Mexican general, suggesting unmistakably the figure of Louis-Philippe. The eldest son of the king occupied a box, and left the theatre in anger. The actor was greeted with hisses and loud laughter, while his efforts to redeem himself by making his lines ridiculous were ill-received. Balzac, disheartened by the sad outcome of his venture, took to his bed, overwhelmed by physical exhaustion. He hastened to declare, however, that the evening had been a financial success, and that he had desired nothing more. He also hinted that Lemaître's action might have been aimed against Harel, director of the theatre, whose relations with the actor were strained at the moment.¹² Victor Hugo and the elder Dumas proved to be friends in the time of need, and the former accompanied Balzac to the Ministry of the Interior to plead his cause. Their audience was unfruitful.¹³ Hugo's kindness the author of *Vautrin* later recognized in the preface to his play. Dumas also wrote a most cordial letter to Balzac, offering to take up the question of indemnity for him.¹⁴ While the unsuccessful dramatist was still ill, the government agreed to pay him several thousand francs for the injustice that he had suffered, and for the considerable sum that he had lost by his play. Balzac refused money at first, but said later that he would accept an indemnity in proportion to the wrong that had been done him, and not alms. Mme Surville, the author's sister, recounts the affair in the following words:

Inquiète de la révolution qu'avait dû produire le renversement de ses espérances, je cours le lendemain rue Richelieu, dans la chambre que mon frère occupait, et je le trouvai en proie à une grosse fièvre. Je l'emmenai chez moi pour le soigner.

¹¹ *Le Moniteur*, March 16, 1840.

¹² *LEt.*, Vol. I, pp. 533 and 534. March, 1840.

¹³ *Ibid.* Also, *la Revue parisienne*, August 25, 1840. *Œuvres*, Vol. XXIII, pp. 772, 773.

¹⁴ Letter published in *la Revue bleue*, November 28, 1903, part of which reads as follows:

"Voulez-vous que je me charge de demander pour vous une indemnité? Voulez-vous me chiffrer la somme à laquelle s'élève ou votre dette ou vos prétentions? En ce cas, donnez-moi une lettre avec vos pouvoirs près du Ministre. Personne au monde ne le saura. La somme vous sera remise, soit à vous directement, soit à moi, qui vous remettrai. Ni collaborateur, ni juif n'entrera là-dedans, en supposant toutefois que je sois assez heureux pour réussir."

Deux heures après son installation, Victor Hugo, Alexandre Dumas et plusieurs autres de ses confrères accouraient pour lui offrir leurs services.

M. *** arrive et dit à mon frère qu'il se fait fort de lui obtenir une belle indemnité s'il consent à retirer *Vautrin*, afin d'épargner à l'autorité une initiative qu'il lui serait désagréable de prendre.

"Monsieur, lui répondit mon frère, l'interdiction de *Vautrin* me sera fort préjudiciable, mais je n'accepterai pas d'argent en paiement d'une injustice; on défendra ma pièce, car je ne la retirerai pas."

Vautrin fut rayé de l'affiche à la troisième représentation.¹⁵

The director of the Porte-Saint-Martin agreed to revive the play, but it was not until ten years later, while Balzac was in Germany, that *Vautrin* was transferred to the Gaieté and produced without the consent of the author, Rancourt filling the title rôle. Balzac wrote angry protests against this act of piracy both to Louis Véron, editor of *le Constitutionnel*, and to the editor of *le Journal des débats*, denouncing this violation of dramatic rights.¹⁶ On April 1st, 1850, *Vautrin* was revived for a single performance at the Ambigu, with Frédéric Lemaître.

The scene of the drama is laid in Paris in 1816, shortly after the second return of the king, Louis XVIII. Among the émigrés who have become again established in France are the Duke de Montsorel, his wife and his bastard son, the Marquis Albert. The family, which is an old and respected one, is far from happy. In fact, for more than twenty years the Duke has been estranged from his wife, and for twenty years he has deprived her of her only son, insisting that the unhappy mother recognize as the rightful successor to his illustrious name his illegitimate child, the son of a Spanish courtesan.

We are told at the opening of the drama why this cruel separation has been inflicted upon the duchess: how, after seven months of married life, the poor woman bore a son whose legitimacy was doubted by the Duke, suspicious of his wife's relations with a certain Viscount de Langeac. Convinced that her persistent declarations of innocence would only endanger the life of her child, and confident that some day she would find him again, the Duchess has held her peace. Twenty-one years have passed thus, when, at the opening of the drama, the mother declares that she has seen a striking resemblance

¹⁵ *Œuvres*, Vol. XXIV, p. lxxvii.

¹⁶ *Corr.*, p. 660. May 11, 1850.

to her son in the person of a youth whom she has met at the Spanish embassy. She discovers also that this youth, whose name is Raoul de Frescas, is in love with Inès de Christoval, a beauty of high rank and the fiancée of Albert, the Duke's son. The Duchess, with her mother instinct alert after these years of separation and suffering, sends for Raoul and determines to assure herself of his parentage. But her husband's suspicions are aroused, and he resolves to spy upon his wife and this interloper, de Frescas.

In the midst of this unhappy household there arrives a mysterious stranger known to the Montsorel servants as Jacques Collin. This person, entering the house with apparent defiance of locks and keys, displays a great interest in the family secrets. He plies the Duke's valet de chambre, Joseph, with questions. We are left but a short time in doubt as to the identity of these two worthies: the one, inquisitive and sententious, is Vautrin, the Vautrin of the galleys and the Vauquer boarding-house, while Joseph is a former accomplice and friend in crime.

With the second act we learn that the Duke has employed a certain secret agent named Saint-Charles to spy upon the rival of his son. During the bloody September days of 1792 it was Saint-Charles, as we learn later, who betrayed and brought about the execution of Langeac, the man whom Montsorel believed to be his wife's lover. In the meanwhile Madame de Montsorel has asked Raoul to call on her. He arrives, to meet not only the Duke and his son, but also the Christoval family, mother and daughter. The unhappy youth is assailed by questions from both families: who is he, and what is his family. Behind him stands the tragic figure of the Duchess, whispering: "Restez le personnage mystérieux que vous êtes."¹⁷ Heartlessly snubbed both by the Duke and his son, and unable to satisfy the curiosity of the Christovals, Raoul takes his leave with the mysterious name of Vautrin on his lips: "O! Vautrin, pourquoi m'avoir ordonné ce silence absolu?"¹⁸ But what interest has Vautrin in Raoul, and what bond is there between them?

The third act reveals this. Vautrin had escaped from the Toulon galleys some twenty-one years before. During his subsequent wanderings he has met and adopted a tiny child, a boy, whom he educated with a father's care and called Raoul de Frescas. In an

¹⁷ Act II, scene 10.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

atmosphere that reeks of the galleys and the Paris underworld, surrounded by thieves and cut-throats who serve Vautrin and call him emperor, this child has been carefully and luxuriously reared. We are now made aware of the paternal interest which Vautrin has taken in Raoul; how completely he governs the youth's destiny and rules his conduct. This strange guardian, who has given the boy houses, servants, wealth and even position, is also plotting as a final *coup* that he shall marry a Spanish princess, and is determined that nothing shall stand in the way of his project. This is his culminating dream, his final castle in Spain.

Vautrin has reckoned without the Duke de Montsorel and his son. But his suspicions are aroused when Saint-Charles, the Duke's spy, pays him a visit. He threatens to have the latter imprisoned—this man of mystery commands brigands and dungeons on every hand—thereby forcing him to give up certain important documents of the Langeac family, proving the innocence of the Duchess de Montsorel. He may now control the Duke, but to succeed in his ambitious project he has yet much to do.

In the fourth act we see Vautrin at work in the Christoval household. Disguised as a Mexican general, he introduces his ward to them as the son of an immensely wealthy Mexican dictator. With forged letters he has little difficulty in deceiving both Inès and her mother. But Raoul, in spite of his ardent passion, is unwilling to agree to this deception and to compromise his honor. His struggle is short, however, and we see the youth sinking into the toils of his protector. Raoul agrees to Vautrin's deceit.

The final act reveals again the Montsorel home, with a whole web of plotting and espionage about it. There are strange comings and goings of Vautrin's gang by night. It has been arranged that Raoul's rival shall be killed. Vautrin, the emperor, is himself directing the energies of his men, and when he rifles the desk of Montsorel, he learns for the first time that Raoul is really the heir of the family. In the meanwhile, Saint-Charles, escaped from prison, has summoned the police. The moment of Vautrin's renunciation has come. Producing the genuine proofs of the Duchess's innocence, and seeing the family finally reconciled, he takes a tender leave of Raoul and is led away by the police.

Although Balzac lived during the very fervent days of romanticism, the marked tendencies of this school made themselves little felt

in the Human Comedy. Moreover, we have already seen how the realist flayed the dramatic ideals of Hugo and the melodramatists in his criticism of the contemporary stage. We are amazed therefore, when we come to his first stage production, to find it thoroughly like the current melodrama of the day.

What is the essential plot of *Vautrin*? A criminal outcast from society wishes to set the object of his creation, "le fils de son esprit et de son fiel," in the highest niche of society. His ambitious design is frustrated by the fact that this child whose destiny he has controlled is the son of a proud and beautiful member of this same society, a mother unjustly accused, who finally claims her own. In his intrigue Balzac has followed the popular melodrama very closely. He wishes to emphasize in this play the revolt of a criminal against society, the romantic "force qui va," with which the public was familiar. But there is little naturalness in this intrigue, and the composition is marred to a serious extent by unnecessary deviations from the main theme, by complicated counter-plots in which spies and disguises and intercepted messages play a large part, and by a constant mingling of the comic with the serious. The exposition is long and tedious, and the reader's interest begins to flag before the first act is over. The essential facts of the play are told in the most haphazard fashion, chiefly by monologue and whispered asides which are little in keeping with real life. The central character of the drama is *Vautrin*, but he does not figure in the intrigue until the third act, when we see him surrounded by his band of criminals. This central figure should be prepared for us with care, yet for two full acts, while he appears from time to time on the scene like the protean figure of the vaudeville, our interest is not aroused in him. In the third act we are transported rudely to a world of thieves and cut-throats comfortably moving in a drawing-room. For a time we are impressed with the sparkle of the comic scenes between *Vautrin* and his rogues, scenes grossly comic to be sure, like the sinister recitals of *Vidocq*, yet the interest in the intrigue ceases, while we follow with bewilderment a maze of melodramatic incoherences. In like manner the comedy of the fourth act, exaggerated on the famous first night by *Lemaître* in his "toupet pyramidal," is clever, but there is no longer any attempt at artistic construction; scenes follow one another pell-mell, reaching a delirious climax in the last act, where the sudden entrances, the plots to kill, the secret doors, the whispered threats, and fortunate arrivals follow in rapid succes-

sion. Let us take a single example of Balzac's utter disregard for reality in his mad effort to move his characters on and off stage. Vautrin suddenly comes upon the Duchess de Montsorel and her maiden aunt. Wishing to send the latter away, he tells her that the Marquis is being strangled by two assassins, and advises her to go to his aid. A strange order to give to an old lady! The plot of *Vautrin* resembles that of an ordinary melodrama, in which the author assumes free liberty regarding his characters, and allows them to move in and out of the loose framework he has constructed with utter disregard for the niceties of construction.

The characters of *Vautrin* are thoroughly romantic. They are divided into two unreconcilable groups—the “gens du monde,” and the “forçats,” both moving with ease in the drawing-rooms of fashionable Paris. But Balzac made his mistake when he introduced high society into this melodrama. These “gens du monde,” like their counterparts in the Human Comedy, are pale creatures, psychologically unsound and uninteresting. The language which they employ is for the most part the stilted language of the romanticists, inevitably terminating in pompous tirades. The Duchess is probably the worst offender in this respect. She constantly retards the action to give vent to lengthy expressions of martyrdom. This mother, who vows vengeance upon her enemies and details her woes in the most intimate and harrowing manner, is scarcely better than the grief-stricken mother in *l'Auberge des Adrets*, perhaps the type par excellence of this character. The Duke and his son are drawn with even less psychological care. Balzac puts much of the exposition into the mouth of the one, and offsets the legitimate son with the other. Raoul presents the handsome figure of a “jeune premier,” for whose sake a mother's tears have been shed. This romantic figure, overwhelmed by the disillusion and mystery which surrounds him, is a weaker brother of Vautrin's other protégés, Eugène de Rastignac and Lucien de Rubempré. But, unlike Eugène, Raoul has had no contact with the outside world; he has never known the Vauquer boarding-house nor been the lover of a great lady. Indeed, the hothouse existence which the ill-starred youth has led bears little resemblance to reality. His fine manners, his elegance and aristocratic bearing which permit him to enter the most exclusive society, bear no evidence of the hideous company in which he has

lived. Like Lucien, he has been forced to accept the paternity of Vautrin, deriving from it his whole existence; like Lucien also he has been created to inspire love, and when this human passion overtakes him, when he "sees heaven for the first time, and is forced to remain on earth," he questions his destiny after the fatalistic manner of a Hugo hero:

Suis-je entre les mains d'un démon ou d'un ange? Tu m'instruis sans déflorer les nobles instincts que je sens en moi; tu m'éclaires sans m'éblouir; tu me donnes l'expérience des vieillards, et tu ne m'ôtes aucune des grâces de la jeunesse; mais tu n'as pas impunément aiguisé mon esprit, étendu ma vue, éveillé ma perspicacité.¹⁹

Raoul questions the means by which Vautrin has made his comfortable existence possible, and swears that his honor must remain intact. In fact, he has a certain sense of honor, because a "jeune premier," according to all rules of the melodrama should have one, but his will is feeble. He appeals to Inès to trust him, to believe in his integrity, and he curses the power of Vautrin over him, yet there is little trace of an inner struggle. Balzac has reproduced a current type, adapting it more or less to the situation of his play.

When we consider the figure of Vautrin, we are struck by the fact that the stage character is much less real and convincing than the creation in the novels.²⁰ In *le Père Goriot* and in *les Splendeurs et misères des courtisanes* he has, as on the stage, heroic proportions, but in the one case he is the symbol of crime, prepared for us carefully by many pages of physical and psychological description, while on the stage the unreality of the figure is too apparent, and Vautrin is too openly a puppet in the hands of a melodramatist. If Vautrin is more shocking on the stage than in the novels, it is clearly because he is not the same figure. The Vautrin of the Human Comedy reveals Balzac occupied as a criminologist. The author is interested in a social "specimen," and makes it the object of a scientific investigation. He has described his brutal physical appearance with the energy that Vidocq employed when he pictured his famous Saint-

¹⁹ Act III, scene 10.

²⁰ *Le Père Goriot* appeared in 1835. Vautrin next figured in *la Torpille*, title under which the first part of *les Splendeurs et misères des courtisanes* was published in 1838. After 1840, when Vautrin was represented theatrically for the first time, the character reappeared in *David Séchard*, in 1843; in the third part of *les Splendeurs et misères des courtisanes*, entitled *Où mènent les mauvais chemins*, in 1846; finally in the fourth and last part of the same novel, *la Dernière Incarnation de Vautrin*, in 1847.

Germain.²¹ Physically a criminal type, the Vautrin of the Vauquer boarding-house displays certain morbid and degenerate tastes. He entered the Toulon galleys first for having taken upon himself the crime committed by an Italian youth whom he loved. Later he attaches himself with unbounded fervor to other youths. This interest is unnatural and repulsive. Prison life has also filled this being with a great feeling of revolt against society, and has rendered him a dangerous egoist. His sole activity is directed towards the fulfilment of certain ambitious schemes for his protégés. His love of Rastignac and his efforts to have the young man marry the daughter of a rich banker lead to a murder and to the soiling of Eugène's soul. In like manner, the Spanish priest, Carlos Herrera, instils his brutal egoism in Lucien de Rubempré. Vautrin is the criminal of force and magnetism; his pessimistic philosophy, his bitter sarcasm and his degenerating effect upon youth are all problems which Balzac has set out to solve pathologically, and they hold the attention of the reader.

On the stage this same figure is totally different. Here we have no longer the terrible criminal, corrupting and degenerating, but a romantic hero, a galley-slave rehabilitated through love and renunciation. As M. de Régnier puts it so aptly, Vautrin is the brother of Marion Delorme.²² On the stage the sentimentalism of the character is stressed to the utmost. It is true that we discover visions of this in the novels also—Vautrin learning to appreciate beauty from Benvenuto Cellini; teaching the lovely Jewess, Esther, the Lord's Prayer—yet in the drama this feminine tenderness and magnanimity assume heroic proportions, and are incomprehensible.

²¹ Vidocq speaks of his criminal as follows: "Saint-Germain was a man about five feet eight inches high, with strongly developed muscles, an enormous head, and very small eyes, half-closed, like those of an owl; his face, deeply marked with the small-pox, was extremely plain; and yet, from the quickness and vivacity of his expression, he was by many persons considered pleasing. In describing his features, a strong resemblance would suggest itself to those of the hyena and wolf, particularly if the attention were directed to his immensely wide jaws, furnished with large projecting fangs; his very organization partook of the animal instinct common to beasts of prey. As he had acquired the airs and manners of good society, he expressed himself when he chose with ease and fluency, and was almost always fashionably and elegantly dressed, he might be styled as a 'well-bred thief.'"—*Memoirs*. Translation by E. L. Carey and A. Hart, 1834, p. 201. One might compare this figure and Vautrin.

²² *Journal des débats*, May 21, 1910.

This type was exceedingly common on the stage about 1840.²³ It is Hugo's

Agent aveugle et sourd de mystères funèbres!
Une âme de malheur faite avec des ténèbres!²⁴

expressing the great romantic revolt against society. Like the redskin of Cooper, Vautrin finds man's life a struggle for existence in the face of countless dangers:

Après tout, c'est la vie d'un Indien entouré d'ennemis, et je défends mes cheveux.²⁵

The real power of this world lies outside of society, either with kings or with criminals.²⁶ Balzac is adding merely another reproach against society that the outlaw *Hernani* and the valet *Ruy Blas* had already voiced. Vautrin, the superman, is another figure of romantic disenchantment and pessimism, whose bitter philosophy, when preached from the stage, Balzac's audience was not inclined to tolerate. Frédéric Lemaître realized this, when he attempted to renew in the rôle the buffoonery of Robert Macaire. The character is thoroughly romantic, a mingling of sinister criminality and paternal tenderness. To Raoul, Vautrin cries:

Mon cœur doit être pour toi ce que le ciel est pour les anges, un espace où tout est bonheur et confiance.²⁷

It is the same romantic cry that Triboulet utters in *le Roi s'amuse*:

Ma fille, ô seul bonheur que le ciel m'ait permis.²⁸

This constant mingling of the base with the elevated, of comedy and real drama, these violent gestures and cries, the appeal to the nerves of the spectators, are all the tricks of the romantic stage, while through them all the moral lesson, the "idée sévère" of Hugo is lacking. M. Fernand Roux, in an admirable discussion of the character of Vautrin, has expressed clearly the reason for its failure upon the stage:

La première condition de réussite au théâtre, c'est la vie; il faut que l'illusion reste aussi proche que possible de la réalité ou bien l'artifice apparaîtrait comme les fils

²³ Romantic literature was immensely interested in criminals of various sorts; it is sufficient to recall besides *les Misérables*, Hugo's *Claude Gueux* and *le Dernier Jour d'un condamné*. On the latter, see the article by Gustave Charlier in *la Revue d'histoire littéraire*, July-December 1915, pp. 321-60.

²⁴ *Hernani*, act III, scene 4.

²⁵ Act I, scene 5.

²⁶ Act III, scene 10.

²⁷ Act III, scene 10.

²⁸ Act II, scene 3.

dans un spectacle de marionnettes. Or, Vautrin n'existe pas; il est tour à tour trop infâme et trop grand, trop noble et trop trivial, trop philosophique et trop peuple.²⁹

The false heroism and final renunciation of Vautrin merely shocked the pit, who, willing to accept the heroic proportions of the criminal in the novel, were disgusted by them on the stage.

On the fourteenth of March, 1840, when the audience of the Porte-Saint-Martin witnessed the first performance of Balzac's drama, *Vautrin*, they were not seeing for the first time a new creation of the author. They were already familiar with the muscular ex-convict of *le Père Goriot* and with the Spanish priest of *la Torpille* who charged himself with the rôle of Providence in behalf of a friendless youth.³⁰ Having already placed his figure of *Vautrin* in the novels, where it had become popular, when Balzac began to write for the stage, what is more natural than to find a reincarnation of this figure for a popular actor, Frédéric Lemaître, whose successes at the moment were due to the interpretation of a similar rôle. It was the novelist's belief, moreover, that isolated novel or drama expressed life badly. He intended that his characters should appear and reappear in his work, with the result of a certain continuity of creation. A detail of costume, a striking word or characteristic gesture often called up in his mind a whole new character. He had seen Frédéric Lemaître bluff and bluster through *le Paradis des voleurs*. Here was an excellent opportunity for him to introduce his already conceived character in a play which might capture the public.

In fact, the character of the ex-convict, transformed into a benefactor of humanity and ready to render some noble service, was a familiar one at this period, and was especially well-known at the theatre. A drama called *l'Honnête Criminel*, by Fenouillot de Falbaire, which Brazier, in his *Chroniques des petits théâtres*, tells us was produced in 1768,³¹ seems to have been one of the first of these plays dealing with a galley-hero, and in it we discover vague outlines

²⁹ Balzac *jurisconsulte et criminaliste*, 1906, p. 283.

³⁰ In his *Histoire des treize*, dated February 1833, Balzac had created a brother type to Vautrin—Ferragus, the chief of a band of outlaws who were bound together to defy all social laws.

³¹ Paris, 1883. Vol. II, p. 296.

of the Jean Valjean and the Vautrin types. Among the numerous pantomimes written by the prolific Jean-François Mussot, better known by his pseudonym, Arnould, was one called *la Forêt noire*, staged at the Ambigu-Comique, according to Brazier, about 1792.³² This successful pantomime introduces on the scene a young boy who has been stolen by an organized band of robbers, and who finally converts his captors. With the advent of Pixérécourt and his melodramas, we find still further instances of this type of hero. In *Victor, ou l'enfant de la forêt*³³ the son of a brigand who is a bitter enemy of society is brought up by a certain Baron Fritzerne. When Victor learns that his real father is about to attack the baron's castle, he goes to him and begs him to renounce his undertaking. The brigand defends his trade, and declares that he is not a robber but an avenger. In 1802, the Ambigu theatre presented a play by Cuvelier de Trye called *le Tribunal invisible ou le fils criminel*, in which the interest centered about a certain Count of Heidelberg, the leader of a mysterious tribunal, whose meetings are carried on in the depths of the forest. Finally, in 1833, on the 25th of April, the bill-board of the Porte-Saint-Martin bore this imposing announcement: *L'Auberge des Adrets. Le dernier quart d'heure, épilogue terminé par le Paradis des voleurs, épisode fantastique par MM. Frédérick Lemaître, Serres, Saint-Paul*.³⁴ This melodrama in three acts had been first composed for Lemaître by three popular dramatists, Benjamin Antier, Saint-Amand and Paulyanthe, and represented at the Ambigu-Comique for the first time, July 2, 1823. It was taken later—January 28, 1832—to the Porte-Saint-Martin, where the sombreness of the plot seemed to point to a failure. Lemaître, always familiar with the tastes of his public, hit upon the happy scheme of remodeling the play, making a grotesque figure of the gruesome hero. *Robert Macaire*, the incarnation of criminal buffoonery, was the result, and all Paris flocked to the Folies-Dramatiques to see the new piece.³⁵ The remodeled play was made up of a series of loose episodes which served merely to present the grotesque figure of Robert Macaire, an escaped criminal, whose remarkable wit and charlatanism, whose cynical regard for society follow him through a series of the most burlesque adventures. In choosing a similar hero

³² *Ibid.*, Vol. I, p. 64.

³³ Ambigu, November 9, 1797.

³⁴ See Duval, *Frédérick Lemaître et son temps*, 1876, p. 132.

³⁵ See page 52, note 3.

for his first play Balzac would then be catering to a very popular taste; his appeal would be to those eager souls who were already familiar with his hero of fiction, who, with this former creation still in their minds, would welcome with avidity the further lively adventures of his hero. There is no doubt too that Balzac was eager to see Lemaître play the rôle. In the preface to the play we read: "L'auteur expliquerait-il son œuvre? Mais elle ne pouvait avoir que M. Frédérick Lemaître pour commentateur." It was Frédérick Lemaître, the idol of the melodrama, who had just taken Paris by storm with the grotesque figure of Robert Macaire. "*Robert Macaire* est l'élus de la foule; on l'aime, on l'admire, on l'applaudit," writes Jules Janin in *les Débats*, and among those who saw and applauded this sparkling bit of buffoonery was the author of *Vautrin*. Later he wrote of it:

C'est la seule grande pièce de notre temps, elle est toute aristophanesque.³⁶

What is more natural than that Balzac, mindful of the popularity and of the resulting financial success of *Robert Macaire*, interpreted by Frédérick Lemaître, should search about for a similar rôle to suit him.

There are also certain suggestions of plot and character in the sombre original of *Robert Macaire*, the melodrama known as *l'Auberge des Adrets*. In this play two fathers discuss the marriage of their children, a boy and a girl. Dumont, the father of the boy, declares that Charles is not his own son, that he found him in an inn at Grenoble and adopted him. There is a striking resemblance here to the mystery about Raoul's birth and adoption by Vautrin, the latter declaring that he found the boy a beggar along the road. In the same drama, a mother, who has lost her son and has been unjustly accused of a wrong that she has never committed, finally has the child restored to her. The poor woman, whose misfortunes have been caused by a worthless husband, rants of her sufferings and threatens a mother's vengeance in much the same manner that the Duchess de Montsorel does. In the end Robert Macaire, the genius of evil, unites mother and son, and dies.

The numerous disguises of Vautrin Balzac has also borrowed from *Robert Macaire*. This insistence upon costume was an old melodramatic trick much practised by Ducange and his school. But

³⁶ *Lettre à M. Hippolyte Castille*, appeared first in *la Semaine*, dated October 11 1846, *Œuvres*, Vol. XXII, p. 368.

the taste for scenery and dress was also an object of special care in the romantic drama, illustrated, for example, in Vigny's *Maréchal d'Ancre* and in the historical pageants of Dumas. Vautrin wears seven complete changes of costume, ranging from that of a foreign diplomat, a business man, to that of a Tartuffe in black, a Mexican general and a bourgeois Napoleon! Macaire introduces himself at the Auberge des Adrets in a disguise, and poses throughout the later travesty as some personnage other than his real self. The scene where Vautrin appears as a Mexican general and carries on a ridiculous dialogue in patois with Lafouraille also suggest the scene where Macaire and Bertrand appear before the "réunion électorale" in parliamentary costume. Lafouraille, the light-fingered accomplice of Vautrin, reproached by his master for thieving, is the counterpart of Bertrand, who steals a ring from the mayor's wife, M. Magloire's handkerchief, and even tries to steal from his chief.

This popular vaudeville type, Robert Macaire, whose character is a mingling of derision, sarcasm, horrible gaiety, elegance and grace, furnished Balzac with more than one trait for *Vautrin*. This influence may have come before the play was conceived, and the bursts of sinister laughter, the cold, calculating and murderous designs, the feigned elegance and outbursts of song of Lamaitre's creation may have already found their way into the Vauquer boarding house. At all events, when Balzac came to put Vautrin on the stage, he remembered the success of *Robert Macaire* and the interpreter of the rôle.

Balzac declares that the original of Vautrin really existed.³⁷ The model which he unquestionably took for this extraordinary character was a certain François Vidocq, a notorious ex-convict from the galleys of Brest and Toulon, who later became "chef de la sûreté" at Paris. Balzac had met Vidocq on several occasions, and they became quite good friends.³⁸ There is, moreover, every reason to believe that Balzac had read the memoirs published under his name, and obtained from the highly coloured and exaggerated recitals the principal episodes for his Vautrin exploits.³⁹ First of all, a word

³⁷ *Lettre à M. Hippolyte Castille. Œuvres*, Vol. XXII, p. 364.

³⁸ Gozlan, *Balzac chez lui*.

³⁹ See Gozlan, *Balzac chez lui*; also Le Breton, *Balzac*, pp. 172 and 173; Roux, *Balzac juriconsulte et criminaliste*, p. 357.

might be said about the name Vautrin. In Vidocq's *Memoirs*⁴⁰ the author recounts an exciting chase after a certain counterfeiter whom he captured after a violent hand-to-hand fight. The man's name was Watrin.⁴¹ The importance of this episode is emphasized by the fact that the capture was the result of his first work as police agent. It is very likely that Vidocq, so loquacious and so much on his mettle before the great man, Balzac, had told him of this adventure. Balzac whose eagerness for names and whose belief in their significance was so great, may very easily have hit upon his ex-convict's name in this manner. There are, however, in the play certain traces of the author's association with Vidocq which do not occur in the novels, strengthening the belief that Vidocq and his tales were an all-important source. In the play we have the following list of Vautrin's accomplices and spies:

François Cadet (Philosophe), cocher
 Fil-de-soie, cuisinier
 Buteux, portier
 Joseph Bonnet, valet de chambre
 Philippe Boulard (Lafouraille).

We have also Charles Blondet, called le Chevalier de Saint-Charles, in the employ of the Duke de Montsorel.⁴² In the *Memoirs* we read of an escaped convict from Toulon who called himself Cadet-Paul.⁴³ *Philosophe*, in criminal argot, Vidocq tells us means *misérable*.⁴⁴ At least four of the Balzac spies bear names beginning with *B*: Buteux, Bonnet, Boulard, Blondet. Compare with these the following list of Vidocq's assassins and thieves: Bouhin, Boudin, Boucault, Bouthey, Bourdarie, Boudier, Blondy, Blondel. It seems quite possible that Balzac, with his fondness for just the right appellation,

⁴⁰ *Mémoires de Vidocq, chef de la police de sûreté jusqu'en 1827, aujourd'hui propriétaire et fabricant de papier à Saint-Mande*, Paris, 1828, Vol. I and II. Last two volumes appeared the following year.

The author of this study has been forced to use an American translation of Vidocq: *Memoirs (until 1827)*. Translated from the French, Phila., E. L. Carey and A. Hart. Balto., Carey, Hart and Co., 1834.

⁴¹ *Memoirs*, p. 193.

⁴² Lafouraille in *les Splendeurs et misères des courtisanes* is La Pouraille, a celebrity of three galleys, with a mania for disguises. Fil-de-soie figures both in *les Splendeurs et misères des courtisanes* and in *le Père Goriot*.

⁴³ p. 115.

⁴⁴ *Les Voleurs, physiologie de leurs mœurs et de leur langage*. Second edition, Paris, 1837.

found here in Vidocq the right assortment of splendid-sounding names. The idea of an organized band of fugitive galley prisoners, perpetrating daily robberies as Vautrin's gang is doing, with a recognized leader for whom they have the greatest respect, is also borrowed from Vidocq.⁴⁵ The scene between Vautrin and Saint-Charles, where the former assumes the dress of a German and the accomplice, Lafouraille, speaks broken French, recalls the interesting case which Vidocq relates in which he was disguised as a German servant, and employed a Rhenish accent.⁴⁶ Vidocq also recounts the history of a certain Jossas, known as the Marquis de Saint-Armand de Feral, one of the most famous robbers of Paris and a former companion of Vidocq at Toulon. This thief used to operate by means of false keys, meditating a burglary a long time in advance. He passed himself off in high society as a Cuban creole, and frequently asked and obtained the hands of daughters of distinguished families, usually making off with the dowry before the date set for the marriage. Vautrin likewise enters the Montsorel house, obtains wax impressions of the locks for the purpose of robbing the Duke's study; he plots to marry off Raoul as the son of a Mexican dictator to a Spanish heiress, himself assuming the rôle of a Mexican general.⁴⁷ The note of pessimism in Vautrin's reflections on his former miserable life recalls certain retrospective passages in Vidocq's history where he

⁴⁵ *Memoirs*, pp. 186 and 191.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 313.

⁴⁷ Paul Ginisty, the author of an extremely interesting book on the melodrama, thinks that Balzac borrowed from other sources some of his traits for Vautrin, among others, from the history of a celebrated escaped convict, Pierre Coignard, alias Count Pontis de Sainte-Hélène, a lieutenant-colonel in the service of Louis XVIII. Balzac, in fact, alludes to Coignard in *la Dernière incarnation de Vautrin*, in the scene where Vautrin is recognized by La Pouraille and Fil-de-soie at the Conciergerie. Ginisty writes: "Il s'est manifestement souvenu de Coignard dans le drame de *Vautrin*. Dès le premier acte, Vautrin, en tenue de soirée, s'introduisant dans l'hôtel de Montsorel, s'adresse au valet de chambre Joseph, son affilié, et lui dit: 'Je t'ai demandé les empreintes de toutes les serrures du cabinet de monsieur le duc. Où sont-elles?' Au quatrième acte, Vautrin paraît en uniforme de général, après qu'on l'a vu, à l'acte précédant, donner ses instructions à ses complices." (*De Quoi est fait Vautrin*, *Journal des débats*, May 27, 1910). Coignard was especially fond of obtaining wax impressions of locks in certain houses which he visited, turning them over later to his accomplices who made good use of them. Continuing in the same article, Ginisty writes: "Balzac avait été frappé de bien des circonstances dans le procès de Coignard de 1817, où l'accusé resta beau joueur, ayant gardé, pendant sa détention préventive à la Force, un singulier ascendant sur ses co-détenus."

tells of his honest struggles after bitter years in the galleys, his constant fear of arrest, and the association with his former criminal companions:

No hell can be imagined equal to the torment in which I now existed. . . . Sometimes I trembled at the thought of my apprehension, and my home was transformed into a filthy dungeon; sometimes it was surrounded by the police, and their pursuit laid open proofs of a misdeed which would draw down on me the vengeance of the laws.⁴⁸

In like words Vautrin speaks of his former life:

L'enfer! c'est le monde des bagnes et des forçats décorés par la justice et par la gendarmerie de marques et de menottes, conduits où ils vont par la misère, et qui ne peuvent jamais en sortir.⁴⁹

We know that Balzac was accused of having offended good taste and morality in his play. The official interdictions on the Monday following the first performance referred to the immorality of the subject. The press attacked him also on these same grounds. Balzac took up the defense of his play against this charge, and declared, in all probability with truth, that the indictment against morality merely hid the royal disfavor at the principal actor, Frédérick Lemaître. His intentions are also expressed in the preface to the first edition of *les Splendeurs et misères des courtisanes*, written in 1844:

Quelques plumes animées d'une fausse philanthropie font, depuis une dizaine d'années, du forçat, un être intéressant, excusable, une victime de la société; mais, selon nous, ces peintures sont dangereuses et antipolitiques. Il faut présenter ces êtres-là ce qu'ils sont, des êtres mis à toujours *hors la loi*. Tel était le sens infiniment peu compris de la pièce intitulée *Vautrin*, où le personnage concluait à son impossibilité sociale, en offrant le combat dramatique de la police et d'un voleur incessamment aux prises.⁵⁰

This social import, however, we are forced to believe was added by the author after the play was written, for at the time he certainly had no definite well-formed philosophical intention.

⁴⁸ *Memoirs*, p. 173.

⁴⁹ Act III, scene 10. It is curious to note, before leaving Vidocq, whose influence seems to have been more or less direct upon Balzac's play, that in May 1910, there was given at the Théâtre Sarah-Bernhardt a five-act play by Émile Bergeret, called *Vidocq, empereur des policiers*. Henri de Régner, reviewing this play in *le Journal des débats*, May 27, 1910, says Vidocq has here been *dévautrinisé*.

⁵⁰ *Œuvres*, Vol. XXII, p. 576.

In conclusion, it must be admitted that *Vautrin* is a play of little dramatic value. Through the mingling of comedy and drama, the "pathétique brutal" and unreality of the action, the stilted and lachrymose language of the characters and the heroic proportions which the author has given them, and through the melodramatic insistence on scenery and costume, the play is frankly romantic. It is the product of a day of melodrama, with little to distinguish it from the contemporary plays of Pixérécourt or Ducange. Written for popular taste, to be acted by a popular comedian, it was no better than thousands of other ephemeral productions of the boulevard stage.

LES RESSOURCES DE QUINOLA

In September 1841, Balzac writes that a new play has been completed bearing the name, *les Rubriques de Quinola*.¹ In spite of the financial reverses of *Vautrin*, the author seems to have looked forward with his usual sanguine spirit towards this new venture. In January of the following year the name of the comedy was changed, and Balzac writes to Mme Hanska:

Pour parler affaires, j'ai fait un grand pas. Du 5 au 7 février on représente à l'Odéon *l'École des Grands Hommes*, une immense comédie sur la lutte d'un homme de génie avec son siècle. La scène est en 1560, en Espagne. Il s'agit de l'homme qui fit manœuvrer un bateau à vapeur dans le port de Barcelone, le coula et disparut. Si j'ai un succès, je pars; si je tombe, il faut faire quatre volumes pour pouvoir gagner l'argent du voyage. . . . Tout le monde croit à un immense succès pour *les Ressources de Quinola*, le faux titre de ma pièce. Je garde celui que je vous ai dit pour le dernier moment.²

Preoccupied as was the author of *Quinola* with a financial success for his play, he seems also to have had an immense amount of ambition to outdo the other dramatists of the year whose plays had not succeeded.³ He wished to produce the "taking" play of the season:

Ce n'est plus l'auteur ni l'homme affamé d'argent, c'est l'amant qui désire un succès.⁴

he also writes to Mme Hanska about the same time.

The story of the first reading of the play in 1842 to Auguste Liroux, director of the Odéon, and to the actors of the company is too well-known to be repeated here. Léon Gozlan, who was an interested spectator on the occasion, recounts the story at full length in his volume entitled *Balzac chez lui*.⁵ Gozlan tells us that Balzac read four acts, then declared that the fifth was not yet written; also that he then proceeded to improvise the fifth act much to the surprise of the company, and to the utter disgust of Mme Dorval, for whom a principal rôle had been written. Rehearsals of the play began

¹ *LEt.*, Vol. I, p. 569. September 30, 1841.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 573-4. January 5, 1842.

³ See *supra*, p. 4.

⁴ *LEt.*, Vol. II, p. 5. January 11, 1842.

⁵ Pages 102-146. See also Liroux in *le Constitutionnel*, August 25, 1851.

almost immediately, with the last two acts unfinished. All the details of Balzac's eccentric dealings with Liroux, the substitution of Mme Hélène Gaussin for Mme Dorval, as well as the bizarre distribution of seats, the author's ticket speculation and the almost empty auditorium, recalling in themselves the vagaries of Balzac's inventor-hero, are related with much detail by Gozlan in the volume just cited. The story of Balzac's disgust with the play, his neglect to finish its composition, his letters to Mlle Sophie Koslovski, demanding the addresses of prominent Russians to whom he wished to send seats for the first night,⁶ his immense boasting about the quality of the play and about its costly production, his feverish agitation over its outcome and his eleventh-hour demand for the rejected "claqueurs"—all suggest in the most striking fashion a page from the life of one of his own monomaniacs. Gozlan, who recounts this story as an eye-witness, should be consulted for the complete history.⁷

Les Ressources de Quinola, a comedy in five acts with a prologue, was given for the first time at the Odéon theatre on March 19, 1842. The play, one volume in-8, was published by Souverain with a preface dated Lagny, April 2, 1842, preceding by four days the publication of the first part of the first edition of the Human Comedy.⁸

In the sumptuously fitted home of Balzac on the Avenue Fortunée, —today, the Rue Balzac—the home to which the novelist brought his Russian bride only a few months before his death, there was a study hung with green damask and furnished with sombre oak and ebony. Five frames hung on the walls of this room. Two contained the portraits of Columbus and Salomon de Caus. The remaining three were empty, and these, we are told, were to be occupied by the portraits of Fulton, Gutenberg and Galileo.⁹ Five representatives of the world's injustice! "L'ironie du monde est plus funeste aux gens de talent qu'à tous les autres," writes somewhere Mme de Staël. Before he had hung his martyred men of science and invention upon his study walls, Balzac had already painted them on the pages of his Human Comedy. Balthazar Claës and David Séchard

⁶ *Corr.*, pp. 357, 359, 360.

⁷ See also the criticisms of the first performance in *le Courrier français*, March 21; *la Gazette de France*, March 21 and 30, 1842.

⁸ Lovenjoul, *Histoire des œuvres de Balzac*, pp. 5 and 222.

⁹ Unsigned article in *la Revue française*, June 20, 1856.

were both victims of the world's irony. Likewise, *les Ressources de Quinola*, as the author tells us, is "le débat d'un grand homme avec son siècle."¹⁰ The great man is Fontanarès, the inventor of a steam-propelled boat, believed by the Holy Inquisition to be the work of the devil. In the prologue to the play we are at the Spanish court at Valladolid, where Quinola, late of the Tunis galleys, is seeking an audience with the all-powerful monarch, Philip II, in behalf of his master, Fontanarès. The king that day has heard of the destruction of his Invincible Armada, and is inclined to listen with favor to tales of new vessels. Heedless then of the warnings of his spiritual advisors, he causes the inventor to be brought before him, and grants him permission to try out his experiments at Barcelona, promising a dukeship if he succeeds, and death if he fails.

At Barcelona, where we are transported in the first act, Fontanarès and Quinola are facing death from poverty. Moreover, all the rich and powerful of the kingdom are leagued against the poor inventor. We are presented in rapid succession to the figures with whom his unhappy destiny is to be linked: Don Frégose, the old viceroy, and his mistress, the lovely Venetian, Faustine Brancadori; Lothundiaz, the usurer, and his daughter, Marie, to whom Fontanarès has dedicated the fruits of his labor; Avaloros, the banker, who is credulous enough to believe Fontanarès' invention possible; the secretary to the viceroy of Catalonia, Sarpi, whom Lothundiaz has chosen for his son-in-law. Meanwhile Quinola the resourceful has fallen in with an old friend, a former galley companion who calls himself Monipodio. This ragged rascal, once a thief, now plying the questionable trade of stool-pigeon, listens with greedy interest to Quinola's tale of his master's invention, seeing splendid possibilities for reward or theft in a triple alliance with the two. Consequently, the man of genius will face the world with the sole companionship of these two dirty rogues.

The persecutions of the inventor begin. First, the Venetian, Brancadori, like Potiphar's wife of old, has formed a sudden and violent attachment for him, and with the cleverness of a skilled courtesan she seeks to win his affections. She begins her campaign with a bit of evil advice to Marie, trying to convince the pure-minded girl that she is a hindrance to her lover's work, and that her most noble act of assistance would be to marry Sarpi, or to retire to a

¹⁰ *LEt.*, Vol. II, p. 5. January 11, 1842.

convent. Scorned by Fontanarès as a common harlot, the clever woman is determined more than ever to bring down her prey.

In the third act we are taken into the workshop of Fontanarès, where we see the guileless inventor surrounded and protected by his mysterious band of rogues, Quinola, of course, at their head. The man of genius has fallen grievously in debt to a Jewish money-lender, and has been forced to share his discovery with him. This partnership the Jew has sold to an idiotic fellow named Don Ramon who passes himself off in the world as a savant. But the faithful valet by certain questionable schemes has succeeded in establishing his master's credit, thereby postponing any immediate disaster. Ill-luck, however, continues to pursue the inventor, and in the next act we see him on a public square of Barcelona, where sundry parts of his steamboat are being auctioned off, appealing to the *grandees* of Spain in the name of their sovereign to protect him. Brancadori, the temptress, now offers to take the poor man to Venice where his persecutions would be at an end and his triumph assured. But her renewed seductions are again vigorously repulsed by Marie's lover. In the meanwhile, the time allotted by the king for the experiment draws to a close, and the boat has not been built. Fontanarès now faces not only disgrace, but death. However the wits of the valet have not been idle. Quinola, in some unheard-of manner, has been able to construct with Monipodio's aid *two* steamboats after his master's plans. Seeing the danger in Monipodio's future activity, Quinola has contrived to have his companion deported anew to Africa. Fontanarès is saved, and all Barcelona assembles on the harbor front to see the spectacle. But the honor of the invention is to go to another, to Don Ramon, whose funds the real inventor has been forced to employ. Fontanarès, a ruined man, now cherishes merely the hope of defeating his enemies. Quite unexpectedly a means of revenge presents itself, but it is Monipodio, disgraced by his fellow rogue and bent upon retaliation, who brings this about:

L'enfer nous a ramené, je ne sais comment, Monipodio altéré de vengeance; il est dans le navire avec une bande de démons, et va le couler si vous ne lui assurez dix mille sequins.¹¹

With a cry of defiance, Fontanarès commands Quinola to see that Monipodio carries out to the letter his fiendish scheme, and in view of all Barcelona the boat is sunk. With this disaster comes the news

¹¹ Act V, scene 4.

of Marie's death, and the inventor turns for solace to Brancadori, the magnificent instrument of his ruin and destruction, as he calls her, the woman who has taught him what a world of self-interest and ruse and perfidious scheming this really is.

The construction of this comedy is a striking example of Balzac's feverish workmanship in a field where the marks of unskilled labor and awkwardly-handled tools are visible. He did not at this time understand the construction of a play. We are bewildered by the mass of documentary detail, the detached scenes and the unnecessary dialogue with which the play is overcharged. Opening with a long prologue, which serves merely to present the contrast between the brilliancy of the Spanish court and the sombreness of the Inquisition, the play drags through thirteen scenes of confused exposition before the action really begins. We are finally told that we are to witness a duel between Fontanarès and his age, with Quinola as a second; whereupon we are prepared to witness the opening scenes of this duel. Before this, however, we have the inventor revealed in the chains of the Inquisition, talking in tedious phrases about "Archimède et moi," and about "Galilée, mon maître;" we have an interview between Fontanarès and the king, where the former talks wearily about science, while the grand inquisitor interrupts with information about Luther and the invention of printing. Nearly the whole of the first act is still devoted to the exposition of character—Quinola and Monipodio talking at great lengths about the lineage of Brancadori, and discussing the most intimate family details about Lothundiaz. The act is devoid of any real action, and with the exception of one cumbersome love scene, in which Fontanarès declares his undying constancy to Marie, it has no importance. The interest of the second act centers not so much about Fontanarès and Quinola as about the mistress of old Don Frégose. It is Brancadori's act—that is to say, Mme Dorval's, since the rôle was especially prepared for this actress. Act III contains the best and the worst that there is in the play. The realistic setting, displaying the inventor at work, Quinola's quaint advice about love, and his vulgarly comic scene with the false savant, Don Ramon, stand out against the worn-out melodramatic elements which were the undoing of *Vautrin*, the tiresome scientific discussions, the rapid and bewildering use of disguises, the gradual culmination of Fontanarès' misery and the undramatic ending. Finally, after the scenes of la Brancadori's seduction, the improbable and unexpected climax is reached.

Fontanarès, who has experienced unsurmountable difficulties in constructing his boat, learns that Quinola and Monipodio at the same time, and unaided by him, have built two. How this could come about we are not told. In fact, the intrigue now assumes the most improbable and confusing proportions. We reach the fifth act, an act which Gautier might easily have been parodying when he wrote: "O cinquième acte, tant rêvé, que j'ai poursuivi si opiniâtrement à travers toute la prose de la vie."¹² Monipodio, who has been sent back to the galleys, is suddenly needed again. His reappearance is unwarranted, yet he is able to board the boat whose trial trip is being made—how, we are at a loss even to guess—and sinks it. This action is utterly unjustified and unnatural.

Turning from the construction to the style of *Quinola*, we find the most shocking abuse of romantic license. Balzac has apparently not been intimidated by *Vautrin*, for he has not allowed the galley convicts who formerly haunted the salons of the illustrious Duke de Montsorel to rest. Quinola, a valet, who might have inherited some of the sparkling wit of his illustrious ancestors, the Scapins and the Figaros, is made to talk like the most detestable of Vautrin's rogues. "Je suis comme Jésus-Christ, entre deux larrons," he says, or again: "L'on parle du premier amour! Je ne connais rien de terrible comme le dernier, il est strangulatoire."¹³ Is it Quinola, or Vautrin, who declares: "En attendant un marquisat et une famille, je me nomme Quinola."¹⁴ Sometimes the phrases are heavy and without wit: "Cet homme m'inquiète! il me paraît posséder mieux la mécanique de l'amour que l'amour de la mécanique,"¹⁵ or again: "Sangodémi, il est si rare de faire honnêtement sa fortune et celle de l'État, sans rien prendre aux particuliers, que le phénomène mérite d'être favorisé."¹⁶ Balzac has attempted to lend to his character both cynicism and sparkling wit. Quinola has a certain gross cynicism, but his wit is often lacking.

Fontanarès, making love or discussing science, utters phrases which range in tone from the most flamboyant to the most prosaic. Brancadori also, whom we wish to see the one really strong figure of the comedy, speaks an emphatic language which is far removed from

¹² *Les Jeunes-France*, p. 170.

¹³ Act I, scene 1.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ Act I, scene 17.

¹⁶ *Prologue*, scene 6.

reality. The following passage will illustrate the feebleness of Balzac's style:

Faustine: Ne me démens point, Alfonso! j'ai tout conquis de toi, ne me refuse pas ton cœur! tu n'auras jamais d'amour plus dévoué, plus soumis et plus intelligent; tu seras le grand homme que tu dois être.

Fontanarès: Votre audace m'épouvante. (*Il montre la lettre*) Avec cette somme, je suis encore seul arbitre de ma destinée. Quand le roi verra quelle est mon œuvre, et ses résultats, il fera casser le mariage obtenu par la violence, et j'aime assez Marie pour attendre.

Faustine: Fontanarès, si je vous aime follement, peut-être est-ce à cause de cette délicieuse simplicité, le cachet du génie. . . .

Fontanarès: Elle me glace quand elle sourit.

Faustine: Cet or, le tenez-vous?

Fontanarès: Le voici. . . .

Faustine: Sans or, que pourrez-vous? Votre lutte recommence! Mais ton œuvre, grand enfant! n'est pas dispersée, elle est à moi. . . .

Fontanarès: Comment, c'est toi, Vénitienne maudite?

Faustine: Oui. . . Depuis que tu m'as insultée, ici, j'ai tout conduit . . . Mais combien d'amour dans cette fausse haine! N'as-tu donc pas été réveillé par une larme, la perle de mon repentir, tombée de mes paupières, durant ton sommeil, quand je t'admiraïs, toi, mon martyr adoré!¹⁷

In the main, Balzac is trying to adapt his style to two opposed "genres" which he mingles in the play, the "comédie larmoyante" and the "comédie burlesque." The former style suggests romanticism at its worst; the latter, the over-exercised tricks of *Robert Macaire*.

In presenting his inventor-hero to the theatre public, Balzac has been faithful to the romantic conception of a man of genius. Fontanarès is unhappy, inexorably pursued by fate, a mournful and depressed figure of disordered genius, turning like a child from one toy to another, and petulantly threatening to destroy the most precious of them all. Like the romantic hero also, he is filled with a soul-inspiring ardor. What makes the character uninteresting, however, is Balzac's painting of it. To put such a figure on the stage a gift of poetry is needed, and Balzac has no poetry at his disposal. His hero speaks an emphatic and conventional language: when he talks of science, he is tiresome; when he talks of love, he is ridiculous. Balzac has no fitting language in which to express his hero's soul-combats, his hesitations, his struggles, consequently the character

¹⁷ Act IV, scene 16.

is unreal and psychologically unsound. Fontanarès is not a type from Balzac's world of monomaniacs, all of whose defeats are made so poignantly plain or futile through struggle. Balthazar Claës struggles and suffers, and we are witness to his gradual attrition of mind and body. He inspires our pity because he drags down with him a noble woman. Fontanarès, guided by Quinola, and weakly protesting against the wiles of Brancadori, is but a mediocre creation. His final defiance of society, coming as it does at the end of a wavering career, has none of the terrible force in it that is inspired by Rastignac's words hurled in the face of Paris. Balzac had already in his novels given dramatic force to the plight of his man of genius, and Avaloros' bloodless proposal to Fontanarès had already been addressed by Claparon to César Birotteau:

Quand l'homme à idées a rencontré quelque bonne affaire, l'homme d'argent lui donne alors une tape sur l'épaule et lui dit: "Qu'est-ce que c'est que ça? Vous vous mettez dans la gueule d'un four, mon brave, vous n'avez pas les reins assez forts; voilà mille francs, et laissez-moi mettre en scène cette affaire."¹⁸

Balzac's inventor is not true to life, and the dramatist did wrong when he attempted to recreate a character of fiction which his genius as story teller was better fitted to produce.

In 1831, Hugo presented his first drama dealing with the courtesan in love, and Madame Dorval created the rôle of Marion Delorme. This actress, who became so immensely popular in the Hugo drama, was Balzac's inspiration for Faustine Brancadori.¹⁹ A descendant of a noble Venetian family, whose ideal of love is that of Petrarch for Laura, young, clever and a coquette, such is the character of Balzac's heroine, the mistress of the Catalonian viceroy. She is the ideal romantic type of the courtesan, living a life of luxury and elegance, surrounded by her devoted court of men. Unfortunately Balzac has made of Brancadori the same unconvincing character as Fontanarès. We perceive here the same careless psychology, the same faded lyric phrases of the melodrama:

Aimer! c'est se dévouer sans attendre la moindre récompense; aimer! c'est vivre sous un autre soleil auquel on tremble d'atteindre. N'habillez pas votre égoïsme des splendeurs du véritable amour. Une femme mariée, Laure de Noves, a dit à Pétrarque: "Tu seras à moi sans espoir, reste dans la vie sans amour." Mais l'Italie a couronné

¹⁸ *César Birotteau*.

¹⁹ The character of Brancadori was finally played by Mlle Georges. See *LEt.*, Vol. II, p. 14. February 22, 1842.

l'amant sublime en couronnant le poète, et les siècles à venir admireront toujours Laure et Pétrarque!²⁰

Consider such a metaphor as the following: "Il est là, debout comme un homme devant un précipice et poursuivi par des tigres."²¹ Brancadori defines hate as follows: "La haine n'est pas le contraire de l'amour, c'en est l'envers."²² Her language is excessive and unnatural, characterized by none of the poetic shading which makes such a character tolerable on the stage. For the type Balzac has taken a well-known romantic conception, sufficiently *invraisemblable* in itself, but which could have been made acceptable either by careful psychological exposition, or, as Hugo might have presented it, clothed in lyric poetry. Unfortunately, Balzac has put into the character neither the one nor the other.

Lothundiaz represents the stock type of the miser father, a very pale shadow of old Grandet, just as Mathieu Magis, the Lombard money-lender, is a pale shadow of Gobseck. Like the latter,²³ Magis has seen much of the world, and has learned to hate it. "Le monde est injuste à notre égard," he says²⁴ in the philosophical tone of the Dutch usurer. He is cautious like some wild animal, "un beau chien de chasse," Brancadori calls him.²⁵ Like Gobseck also, who is not averse to the beauty of old Goriot's daughter, Magis declares: "Mon petit commerce est alimenté par les grandes passions: belle femme, belle prime."²⁶

Quinola, the intriguing valet of Fontanarès, is the combined type of rascality and devotion. With the gaiety of Figaro, the *rouerie* of Scapin and the poorness of Job, as Celler describes him,²⁷ he maintains throughout a remarkable devotion to his master, and finally perfects the invention which the world's defeats have withheld from the inventor. He stands in opposition to all the other characters of the play. He attacks power and wealth, represented in Don Frégose and Avaloros; he attacks the shallow science of Don Ramon, the religious zeal of the Inquisition, the avarice of Lothundiaz. Balzac has made this rogue the most honest man in

²⁰ Act II, scene 10.

²¹ Act IV, scene 16.

²² Act IV, scene 7.

²³ *Gobseck* is dated Paris, 1830.

²⁴ Act II, scene 22.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ *Les Valets au théâtre*, 1875, p. 89.

the play, and also the most practical. He is meant to represent the modern spirit awakening in an age of prejudice and ignorance. The character represents in a measure, however, the deliberate and overdone grotesque of Hugo, lacking the poignant, lyric and exceedingly human note which makes the fool in King Lear a really great figure. Quinola, like Vautrin, is a former galley slave whose real name is Lavradi, a bandit in rags who is none the less versed in the ways of the court; who associates with his former companions of the galleys, and finds his sole consolation in the good cheer of the bottle. Yet this same dirty and disreputable fellow, *mirabile dictu*, knows how to address the most powerful monarch of Europe in fitting phrases! This association with the thieves of the underworld is hardly reconcilable with the devotion of an honest servant. In Quinola we find again the psychology of romanticism and the conventional type of "bon criminel." We allow a certain amount of good and evil to all men, but to depict the same character at one time faultless, at another steeped in all that is wicked and perverse, without transitions or intermediary moral stages, is to depart seriously from reality.

Like Scapin, Quinola is resourceful, but unlike Molière's creation, he is detestable because of the taint of the criminal about him. Like Figaro, he is the "intrigant" and the "insolent," the man of talent, but Figaro is no former convict: his dishonesty is confined rather to love intrigues. In fact, rascality is the sum total of existence for Scapin and Figaro; they delight us with their sparkling wit and their devotion to young lovers, while Quinola, the mocker, the irreverent, the evil-counsellor, who is meant to represent the soul of the common people and to preach a lesson of devotion to the grandees, remains none the less a second Vautrin, a figure of the underworld, whose discourse is stained with thieves' jargon, and whose wit is directed against all that is held sacred and pure.

To Robert Macaire the melodramatists gave a Bertrand; to Vautrin Balzac gave a Lafouraille. In like manner, Quinola is seconded by Monipodio. This character Balzac has borrowed from the *Rinconete y Cortadillo* of Cervantes, a realistic character sketch of Seville, contained in the author's *Novelas ejemplares*, and published for the first time in 1613. The *Novelas* had a great vogue in France, and Balzac probably knew the adaptations made by Florian, published in 1787. In Cervantes' story, Monipodio, an ill-favored barbarian, tall and swarthy, is the president of an organized guild of assassins and pickpockets, a thief ready to "serve God and honest

people," who makes his gang give something of everything they steal to charity. Balzac has made of the character a sort of police guardian to Fontanarès, familiar with the haunts of thieves, ready to serve in any dishonest business. The figure is dull and uninteresting, lacking the vulgar wit of Lafouraille and Bertrand.

In *Quinola* the two essential traits of the romantic drama are present: lyricism, and the use of local color and history. The lyricism of the play is revealed first in the heroic proportions which the author has given to the love scenes. Fontanarès is thoroughly a romantic hero. For him Marie is always a protecting star. To her he cries: "Vous êtes mon étoile, brillante et loin de moi."²⁸ As Marie signals to him from her window, he exclaims: "Mais elle m'aime. . . . Tiens, vois, mon étoile brille."²⁹ So Romeo had cried out in the moonlight beneath the windows of the Capulets, and so many other romantic heroes had expressed their emotion.³⁰ Fontanarès speaks of love as "cette foi humaine, qui rallume le courage quand il va s'éteindre sous la bise de la raillerie."³¹ Like a hero of the Romantic School he rants also about his pride and honor: "Brillant et pur amour par qui je me rattache au ciel pour y puiser l'espérance et la foi; vous venez de sauver mon honneur," he cries to Marie as she saves him from the hands of the alguazils.³² "Tuez-moi, ne me calomniez pas: vous êtes placé trop haut pour descendre si bas," he exclaims to Don Frégose.³³

The comedy is moreover lyric, since under the biting satire on genius we discover the dramatist himself speaking. It is an echo of real personal grief that the author has expressed in the words of Fontanarès: "O, mon Dieu! le talent et le crime seraient-ils donc une même chose à tes yeux?"³⁴ The satire is personal, and beneath it we discern the misfortunes of Honoré de Balzac, man of genius, in

²⁸ Act I, scene 19.

²⁹ Act I, scene 17.

³⁰ "She speaks; O speak again, bright angel."—*Romeo and Juliet*, Act II, scene 2.

"Let her shine as gloriously as Venus of the sky."—*Midsummer Night's Dream*, Act II, scene 2.

"Doña Sol, viens briller comme un astre dans l'ombre!"—*Hernani*, Act II, scene 1.

³¹ Act IV, scene 2.

³² Act IV, scene 3.

³³ Act IV, scene 2.

³⁴ Act III, scene 8.

debt and hounded by creditors, calumniated by the press and misjudged by the public. Like Ruy Blas's appeal to the grandes, Fontanarès (Balzac) cries out to the crowd:

O grands de la terre, riches, vous tous qui tenez en vos mains un pouvoir quelconque, pourquoi donc en faites-vous un obstacle à la pensée nouvelle?³⁶

When Balzac wrote *Quinola*, there was a bitterness in his heart more keen than at any period of his life. He was still resentful over the storm and ignominy of his first play.³⁶ But there was also another cause for his indignation. Less than four months after his novel, *la Transaction* (*Colonel Chabert*), had appeared in *l'Artiste*, a vaudeville was manufactured from it without the author's permission.³⁷ This literary theft, together with a borrowing of an episode from his *Médecin de campagne* by *l'Europe littéraire*,³⁸ inflamed Balzac to such an extent that he wrote his energetic *Lettre aux écrivains français du XIX^e siècle*, which appeared in *la Revue de Paris*, November 1833, urging men of letters to bind themselves together into a society for mutual protection, so that united they might overcome the injustice which meant death to individual genius. The result of this instigation was, as we know, the foundation in 1833 of a Société des Gens de Lettres, organized for the purpose of inspiration and protection. Balzac was admitted to membership in 1838, never having allied himself with the organization before that date.³⁹ Immediately upon entering the society, Balzac drew up a *code littéraire*, setting forth rules for the protection of authors. His defense of men of genius had been expressed elsewhere. Before writing *Quinola*, he had already depicted the sufferings of creative genius in *le Chef-d'œuvre inconnu* (1831), in *la Recherche de l'absolu* (1834), and in *Gambara* (1837). *David Séchard*, written at the same period as *Quinola*, also describes the cruel defeats of a young inventor at the hands of knavish "gens d'affaires." *Quinola* then, was but another personal protest, another stage in this struggle against leagued derision and hatred. The play might easily have borne on its title page the satirical words of Voltaire:

³⁶ Act IV scène 2.

³⁶ See *LEt.*, Vol. II, p. 14. February 22, 1842.

³⁷ *La Transaction* ceased to appear on March 13, 1832. *Colonel Chabert*, a *drame vaudeville* in two acts by Arago and Lurine, was produced at the Théâtre du Vaudeville, July 2, 1832.

³⁸ See letter to Mme Hanska, dated August 1, 1833.

³⁹ See Louis de Royaumont, *Balzac et la société des gens de lettres*, 1913.

Le plus grand malheur d'un homme de lettres n'est pas d'être l'objet de la jalousie de ses confrères, la victime du mépris des puissants du monde, c'est d'être jugé par des sots.⁴⁰

The theft of Fontanarès' discovery, "le vol le plus honteux qui se puisse consommer à la face du ciel et d'un pays,"⁴¹ and the injustice that he suffers from the greed and ignorance and hatred of the Spanish court, are the personal sufferings of the author. Consequently, we have a lyric hero and a picaresque valet who voice Balzac's own satirical and pent-up feelings.

The use of history and local color which is found in *Quinola* is by no means an innovation of Balzac. Since the beginning of the century in fact these had been one of the most marked traits of comedy and drama. Balzac is following the vogue of the historical play prophesied by Mme de Staël,⁴² and followed out by Lemercier, Delavigne and Hugo. Dumas, under the influence of Walter Scott, had produced in 1829, a year before *Hernani*, his *Henri III*, a series of immense tableaux with a historic and picturesque background, lengthy dramatis personæ and numerous local allusions. The Spanish setting for comedy and drama had had an immense vogue before Balzac composed *Quinola*. Pixérécourt's *Maures d'Espagne* (1804), a dramatization of Florian's *Gonzalve de Cordoue*, which Balzac had read, and whose "epic pretensions" he mentions in *la Revue parisienne*,⁴³ was given more than two hundred times in Paris before 1841. Lemercier's *Pinto*, dating from 1800, and made so popular at the Porte-Saint-Martin in 1834 by Bocange, was a historical comedy built about the Portuguese revolution of 1640, presenting a sort of political Figaro, who gives a kingdom to his master. Calderon and Lope de Vega both furnished the French dramatists with sources.⁴⁴ In 1830, Hugo's *Hernani* and Delavigne's

⁴⁰ *Dictionnaire philosophique*.

⁴¹ Act IV, scene 3.

⁴² "La tendance naturelle du siècle, c'est la tragédie historique."—*De l'Allemagne*, II, chap. 15.

"Si le drame historique se vidait de l'intérêt qui s'attache au passé, il trouverait encore une ample matière dans la peinture des mœurs et des passions rajeunies par la révolution et élevées au ton de la poésie par l'épopée de l'Empire."—*Ibid*.

⁴³ *Œuvres*, Vol. XXIII, p. 600.

⁴⁴ In 1824, Scribe wrote the libretto, with Mélesville, to a lyric drama based on Cervantes' *Fuercza de la sangre*, entitled *Léocadie*, Théâtre de l'Opéra-Comique, November 24, 1824, music by Auber. Charrin's melodrama, *le Rapt, ou amour, honneur, et devoir*, was imitated from the Spanish of Calderon, produced first at the Ambigu-Comique, in 1815. *Le Cid d'Andalousie*, by Lebrun, Théâtre Français, March 1, 1825, was imitated from Lope de Vega.

Ruy Gomez were produced on the same night. That same year Dorval and Lemaître were appearing in *Peblo, le jardinier de Valence*, while *Don Carlos*, a tragedy in five acts by Talabot, was being played at the Théâtre Français.⁴⁵ Henri de Latouche's *Reine d'Espagne* was acted first at the same theatre on November 5, 1831, and undoubtedly influenced Hugo to some extent when he came to write *Ruy Blas*. One year later, the name Quinola was given by Musset to a valet in his fantastic comedy, *A quoi rêvent les jeunes filles*.⁴⁶ The fanaticism of Philip II, "le roi dévot," the same king who was soon to interest Balzac, was made the subject of Delavigne's *Don Juan d'Autriche*.⁴⁷ In 1836, Dumas produced a "mystère" in five acts and innumerable tableaux, called *Don Juan de Marana*; the following year, an "opéra-comique" in three acts, laid at Seville, called *Piquillo*.⁴⁸ Finally, in 1838, we come to *Ruy Blas*.⁴⁹

History is used as a background for *Quinola*, with a certain amount of vivid local color. In the preface to his play, dated April 2, 1842, Balzac tells us that the basis for his plot, namely the steamboat invention in the XVIth century, is a historical fact, mentioned in Arago's treatise on steam engines, published in *l'Annuaire du bureau des longitudes*.⁵⁰ Arago cites a curious note contributed by the director of the royal archives of Simancas to the *Correspondance astronomique* of Baron de Zach and published in 1826, which reads as follows:

Blasco de Garay, capitaine de mer, proposa, l'an 1543, à l'empereur et roi Charles-Quint, une machine pour faire aller les bâtiments et les grandes embarcations, même en temps de calme, sans rames et sans voiles.

Malgré les obstacles et les contrariétés que ce projet essuya, l'empereur ordonna que l'on en fit l'expérience dans le port de Barcelone, ce qui effectivement eut lieu le jour 17 du mois de juin de ladite année 1543.

Garay ne voulut pas faire connaître entièrement sa découverte. Cependant on vit, au moment de l'épreuve, qu'elle consistait dans une grande chaudière d'eau bouillante et dans des roues de mouvement attachées à l'un et à l'autre bord du bâtiment.

On fit l'expérience sur un navire de 200 tonneaux, appelé *la Trinité*, arrivé de Colibre pour décharger du blé à Barcelone, capitaine Pierre de Scarza.

⁴⁵ *Hernani* and *Ruy Gomez*, both produced on February 25; *Peblo*, May 4, Ambigu; *Don Carlos*, December 11.

⁴⁶ Published December, 1832, in a volume entitled *Un Spectacle dans un fauteuil*.

⁴⁷ Comedy in five acts, October 17, 1835, Théâtre Français.

⁴⁸ *Don Juan de Marana*, April 30, Porte-Saint-Martin; *Piquillo*, October 31, Opéra-Comique.

⁴⁹ November 8, Renaissance.

⁵⁰ Dominique François Jean Arago, 1786-1853. His *Notice historique sur les machines à vapeur* was published in 1829.

Par ordre de Charles-Quint, assistèrent à cette expérience don Henri de Tolède, le gouverneur don Pierre de Cardona, le trésorier Ravago, le vice-chancelier et l'intendant de la Catalogne. . .

Dans les rapports que l'on fit à l'empereur et au prince, tous approuvèrent généralement cette ingénieuse invention, particulièrement à cause de la promptitude et de la facilité avec laquelle on faisait virer de bord le navire.

Le trésorier Ravago, ennemi du projet, dit qu'il irait deux lieues en trois heures, que la machine était trop compliquée et trop coûteuse, et que l'on serait exposé au péril que la chaudière éclatât. Les autres commissaires assurèrent que le navire virait de bord avec autant de vitesse qu'une galère manœuvrée suivant la méthode ordinaire, et faisait une lieue par heure, pour le moins.

Lorsque l'essai fut fait, Garay emporta toute la machine dont il avait armé le navire; il ne déposa que les bois dans les arsenaux de Barcelone, et garda tout le reste pour lui.

Malgré les oppositions et les contradictions faites par Ravago, l'invention de Garay fut approuvée, et si l'expédition dans laquelle Charles-Quint était alors engagé n'y eût mis obstacle, il l'aurait sans doute favorisée.

Avec tout cela, l'empereur avança l'auteur d'un grade, lui fit un cadeau de 200,000 maravédis, ordonna à la Trésorerie de lui payer tous les frais et dépenses, et lui accorda en outre plusieurs autres grâces.⁶¹

It will be seen from the foregoing citation, which Arago regarded as scientifically and historically unimportant, what pretentious use Balzac has made of the document. In the preface to his play the author declares:

Parmi cinquante faiseurs de feuilletons, il n'en est pas un seul qui n'ait traité comme une fable, inventée par l'auteur, le fait historique sur lequel repose cette pièce des *Ressources de Quinola*.

Longtemps avant que M. Arago mentionnât ce fait historique dans son *Histoire de la Vapeur*, publiée dans l'*Annuaire du bureau des Longitudes*, l'auteur, à qui le fait était connu, avait pressenti la grande comédie qui devait avoir précédé l'acte de désespoir auquel fut poussé l'inventeur inconnu. . .

Balzac has taken no more care than Hugo or Dumas in his reconstruction of history, in spite of the fact that historical and local allusions are constantly put to the fore. The local color is superficial, nor has the author carefully studied Spanish history. We are given merely external details, while there has been no attempt to delineate the psychology of the Spanish people or to reconstruct Spanish society.

The elaborate setting of the prologue in the gallery leading to the chapel of the king's palace, with the crowd of guards and noble-

⁶¹ The fourth edition of *la Notice historique sur les machines à vapeur* is published in Volume V of *les Œuvres complètes* of Arago, Paris, Gide et J. Baudry, 1854-9, 16 volumes.

men, alcaldes and courtiers, recalls at once the opening setting of *Ruy Blas*. The interior of Fontanarès' workshop, with its confusion of wheels, test-tubes, kettles, mathematical instruments, with even the humble fare of the poor inventor detailed by scenic indications; the final act on the terrace of the city hall, with its view of the sparkling sea and the Barcelona shipping in the background, the colorful costumes of the immense crowd which is to witness the destruction of the steam-propelled boat—all suggest the exacting *mise en scène* demanded by the romanticists, and especially by Pixérécourt and the melodramatists.⁵² In Dumas' *Alchimiste*⁵³ the scenes just mentioned had already been identically reproduced: an underground laboratory where Fasio, the alchemist, accused of black art and persecuted by the rich and powerful, conducts his experiments; and a public square before the courtesan Maddelena's house, where the wife of the alchemist pleads for his life.

Another romantic trick, well practised already in *Vautrin*, is the use of disguises. Quinola and Monipodio are bewildering in their rapid changes, successively in rags and silks. Here the trick is overworked and inartistic.

Balzac has chosen for the period of action of his play that which Dumas has used in his greatest historical drama, transferring it, however, to Spain and to the court of Philip II.⁵⁴ In a letter to Mme Hanska, dated January 5, 1842, Balzac says that the action occurs in 1560.⁵⁵ The definitive edition of the plays—Calmann-Lévy, 1879, Volume XX—dates the action as 1533, an evident mistake which has been corrected in the Centenary edition to 1588.⁵⁶ While the author has introduced several incongruous historical references, the events in the main are chronologically correct. At the opening of the play news is brought of the destruction of the Spanish Armada, which occurred of course in 1588. "La France est en feu, les Pays-Bas en pleine révolte, Calvin a remué l'Europe,"

⁵² See especially Pixérécourt's *Christophe Colomb*, and his *Robinson Crusoë*.

⁵³ Drama in five acts and in verse, Renaissance, April 10, 1839.

⁵⁴ Balzac had found Philip II an interesting and fascinating figure, speaking of him at various times in his work. See especially the preface to the first edition of *la Femme supérieure, la Maison Nucingen* and *la Torpille*, dated September 15, 1838. *Œuvres*, Vol. XXII, p. 505.

⁵⁵ *LEt.* Vol. I, p. 574.

⁵⁶ *Œuvres complètes de Honoré de Balzac. Édition du centenaire. Théâtre*, 2 vol. Calmann-Lévy.

says the grand inquisitor,⁵⁷ and these pressing events turn the king's mind from the inventor. In 1588, France was actually in a state of upheaval, leading up to the famous "journée des barricades," when the king was nearly dethroned, and to the assassination of the Duke de Guise the same year. The Netherlands had recently risen in revolt and declared William of Orange stadhouder, seeking protection against the king and his Inquisition. The Reformation was stirring all Europe, and France especially, where the Huguenots had strengthened themselves since the bloody Saint Bartholemew in 1572. The references in the play to Galileo are out of keeping with the other events, since he was not born until 1564, and did not become a suspect of the Inquisition until after 1633, when his treatise on astronomy was denounced as heretical. Fontanarès, a former pupil of Galileo, declares that his master is now lying in prison, and likens his own fate to that of the greater man of genius. The reference which Brancadori makes to an incident about Catherine de Medici and Diane de Poitiers, which she says "occurred the other day,"⁵⁸ is also misplaced, since at the moment Henry II's mistress was dead, and Catherine herself dying.

In *Quinola* we find all the important romantic elements which the contemporaries of Balzac were emphasizing: the use of a picturesque and quasi-historical background for the action; an excess of local color, of tableau effects, of disguises and costuming; a lyric hero, with a picaresque rogue for a companion; a conventional courtesan and a pathetic heroine, misused by the world; with all this, a certain looseness of dramatic construction and an appendage of unnecessary scenes. We search in vain for some trace of the careful realism which is to be found in the *Human Comedy*. The characters are romantic conceptions, lacking the fine shading which reality demands; the technical and characteristic detail which Balzac considered so necessary to reinforce his "idée dominante" is merely superficial. The importance which is given to financial matters is, moreover,

⁵⁷ Act V, scene 5. Compare Schiller's *Don Carlos*, Act I, scene 6:

"Die Pest

Der Ketzerei steckt meine Völker an,

Der Aufruhr wächst in meinen Niederlanden."

Compare also *Hernani*, Act V, scene 1:

"L'empereur aujourd'hui

Est triste. Le Luther lui donne de l'ennui."

⁵⁸ Act II, scene 9.

inserted here without preconceived realistic intention.⁵⁹ Preoccupied constantly with money, Balzac is unable to withhold his exact figures from us, but their interest in this comedy is rather autobiographical than realistic.

The conception of *Quinola* is one which lacks neither truth nor grandeur. The play is a pungent bit of personal satire on science and talent, but the conception is novelistic and its theme belongs more properly to realm of fiction, where our interest may wander far afield with the author into history and science, and where we may turn back to reread the pages at will. The theme lacks room for development on the stage, while the comedy is effaced by the multitude of incidents which are lacking in dramatic importance. Placed upon the stage, with its events of pure fantasy, with its intermingling of the heroic and the burlesque, with its picture of thieves consorting with grandees, and vice triumphant, the play stands without ideal, and fails. The author must surely have realized this himself, when, rebelling against the inconsistencies and lack of reality in the Hugo drama, he cried out: "Victor Hugo n'est pas vrai!"⁶⁰

Balzac's exaggerated account to Mme Hanska of the reception of *Quinola* by the public is interesting:

Quinola a été l'objet d'une bataille mémorable, semblable à celle d'*Hernani*. On est venu siffler toute la pièce, d'un bout jusqu' à l'autre sans vouloir l'entendre, pendant sept représentations consécutives. Aujourd'hui, nous sommes à la dix-septième représentation, et l'Odéon fait de l'argent. . . . Vous lirez quelque jour cette pièce, fruit de tant d'efforts et de travaux. . . . Maintenant tous mes ennemis, et ils étaient en grand nombre, se sont rués sur moi à propos de *Quinola*. Tous les journaux, à deux exceptions près, se sont mis à m'injurier et à calomnier la pièce, à qui mieux-mieux.⁶¹

The critics, almost without exception, were bitter.⁶² Rolle, writing for *le National*, alone seems to have found place for a kind word or two. He writes:

⁵⁹ There are countless references to money and to specific sums in the play. Marie has 10,000 sequins income. Lothundiaz talks of a revenue from a property worth 2,000 crowns, and quotes it in exact figures. Fontanarès needs 2,000 crowns to continue his work. Brancadori's picture gallery has cost her lover nearly his whole fortune, and the old man can think of no prettier compliment to pay his mistress than to say: "Ma fortune vaut-elle une de vos paroles?" Fontanarès, in his horrible predicament, finds that his whole future depends upon money, and the strength of Brancadori's arguments rests in her words: "Sans or, que pourrez-vous?" etc., etc.

⁶⁰ *LEt.*, Vol. II, p. 125. March 19, 1843.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 22 and 23. April 8, 1842.

⁶² See especially Jules Janin in *le Journal des débats*, March 21, 1842.

Il y a de grandes erreurs et de grandes fautes dans la pièce, mais il y a aussi des traits comiques, spirituels et quelquefois profonds que je souhaite à certains feuilletons qui se préparent à l'insulter avec la plus charmante gaieté et la plus agréable fureur.⁶³

The criticism in the monthlies was no less severe. Thierry, writing in *la France littéraire*, April 3, 1842, after a bitter attack on Balzac and his novels, speaks as follows of the play:

Des entrées, des sorties, trois tableaux dans le prologue, mille lambeaux de scènes décousues, recousues, rapprochées, rapiécées çà et là; des cloches, des processions; des gens qui se rencontrent où ils ne devraient pas se rencontrer, qui disent ce qu'ils ne devraient pas dire, qui font ce qu'ils ne devraient pas faire, un père qui regarde toujours quelque chose, afin de ne pas gêner sa fille dans des situations fort délicates, des machines qu'on ne peut pas construire faute d'argent, et qui se trouvent toutes construites dans un coin par deux fripons, une explosion, un couronnement, le saint office, des prophéties, des oracles, la réclame prédite sous Philippe II, et la révolution de juillet, annoncée par un inquisiteur, rapportez donc cela, si vous pouvez, quand tous ces fragments ont cherché, quatre heures durant à se rapprocher, sans pouvoir y parvenir?

G. de Molènes, in *la Revue des deux mondes*,⁶⁴ confines himself especially to the creation of Quinola, comparing the character to Vautrin, of which he declares it to be but a reminiscence:

Le héros de M. de Balzac, c'est le héros de Beaumarchais, moins le brillant costume du corps et celui de la pensée; sur son corps, les honteux haillons qui ont longtemps excité la risée des spectateurs du boulevard, le feutre percé, le pourpoint déchiré et crasseux, remplacent le chapeau enrubanné, la veste étincelante de boutons du joyeux barbier de l'Andalousie; sur sa pensée, les lambeaux de la langue flétrie et déformée que l'habitude d'écrire de gros livres à la hâte a faite aux romanciers de ce temps-ci, remplacent les pimpans atours de la langue coquette et dégagée du *Huron* et de *Candide*. . . . Dans ce qui regarde Quinola, l'œuvre de M. de Balzac n'est pas

⁶³ March 21, 1842.

⁶⁴ April, 1842. This attack called forth an article in *la Revue littéraire et critique*, April 15, defending Balzac against the bitter critics. The author of the article says in part:

"En général, c'est un triste spectacle que de voir un illustre nom se dépopulariser peu à peu et tomber graduellement du sommet d'une haute renommée aux injurieux dédains d'une foule obscure et envieuse.

Mais lorsqu'une pareille chute n'est provoquée par rien, ou qu'elle arrive tout à coup à la suite d'une erreur ou d'un seul faux pas, on ne sait si l'auteur ainsi précipité doit être plaint, ou s'il ne faut pas mépriser celui qui vient l'outrager jusque dans sa défaite. Il faut le dire, c'est là précisément ce qu'ont fait la plupart des critiques qui se sont emparés de la comédie de M. de Balzac. Après l'avoir sifflée au théâtre, ils l'ont immolée dans les colonnes de leurs feuilletons; ils se sont fait une arme de chacun de ses lambeaux, et ils ont lécéré tout à leur aise les autres productions de cet écrivain.

Est-ce là noblement agir, et la réputation littéraire de M. de Balzac, inattaquée jusqu'alors dans son ensemble, doit-elle suffir d'une pareille injustice et périr tout entière au milieu d'une semblable persécution?"

autre chose que Figaro, moins l'esprit d'observation et la verve comique de Beaumarchais; dans ce qui regarde Fontanarès, le maître de Quinola, c'est Chatterton, moins la distinction profonde, le sens délicat et élevé de M. de Vigny.

In his preface, which the author tells us is "d'une douceur angélique,"⁶⁵ Balzac defends his play on the following points:

1. The background for his plot, namely the steamboat invention in the XVIth century, is a historical fact mentioned in a treatise on steam, published in the *Annuaire du bureau des longitudes* by Arago.

2. None of the analyses of his play made by the critics has been correct, and the press has failed to see that Quinola, whom they consider a hideous creation, is a criminal pardoned by the king's grace for perhaps a very slight offence.

3. The title of the Duke de Neptunado, which the king promises to Fontanarès, is in keeping with historical facts of the time, when titles were wont to recall the circumstances for which they were awarded. Gross ignorance has caused the public and the critics to misjudge the author's purpose in introducing this bit of history.

4. Balzac defends his unsuccessful first performance before an audience of paying spectators on the ground that he wished a representative public and independent judges. He accuses his public, moreover, of lack of good faith and justice, and of cruelty, mentioning the names of Gozlan, Hugo, Lamartine and Mme de Girardin as the persons who have showed him a great measure of kindness; mentioning also the benevolent attitude of a few newspapers which were not altogether hostile: *le Commerce*, *le Messager* and *la Patrie*:

Pour caractériser les critiques faites sur cette comédie, il suffira de dire que, sur cinquante journaux qui tous, depuis vingt ans, prodiguent au dernier vaudevilliste tombé cette phrase banale: *La pièce est d'un homme d'esprit qui saura prendre sa revanche*, aucun ne s'en est servi pour les *Ressources de Quinola*, que tous tenaient à enterrer. Cette remarque suffit à l'ambition de l'auteur.⁶⁶

⁶⁵ *LEt.*, Vol. II, p. 32.

⁶⁶ Preface to *Quinola*, dated April 2, 1842.

VI

PAMÉLA GIRAUD

Vice triumphs in *Quinola*, and the curtain falls on disillusion, defeat and shattered ideals. With *Paméla Giraud*, however, virtue shines forth boldly in every scene, and the air is alive with the sentimental expression of it.

Paméla Giraud, a drama in five acts, was produced for the first time on September 26, 1843, at the Théâtre de la Gaîté, the home of the melodrama. The play was published the same year by Marchant, one volume in-8.¹ At the moment of the first performance Balzac was in Russia, and seems to have been little occupied with its outcome. The performance caused none of the agitation or attention in the literary world that *Quinola* and *Vautrin* had produced. "*Paméla Giraud* se répétait sans bruit, et, chose plus singulière encore, sans indiscretions," writes Amédée Achard in *le Courrier français* for October 9, 1843. Undoubtedly a reason for this was that *Paméla*, a very plain and ordinary melodrama, was built along conventional lines, differing little from the typical production of the day. Another reason was no doubt the fact that the author, whose personality dominated both behind and before the footlights of his previously produced plays, the public which had been stirred by a *Vautrin* on the stage and by Lemaître's bold interpretation, the critics who had launched out into tirades of indignation over the composition of *Quinola*, and laughter over the author's eccentricities, all treated this new production with coolness and indifference. Balzac on the stage, moreover, was becoming no unusual thing. Besides the two productions already given, numerous adaptations of his novels had been made and produced with success at Paris: *le Colonel Chabert*, *Eugénie Grandet*, *la Duchesse de Langeais*, *le Père Goriot*, *la Grande Bretèche*, *les Chouans*, *la Recherche de l'absolu*, *César Birotteau*, *le Médecin de campagne*, *l'Histoire des treize*. Balzac's name then was not unfamiliar on the theatrical boards.

When the play was written, we do not know. Amédée Achard, writing in *le Courrier français*, says that it was offered to a "théâtre de vaudeville" in 1837 or 1838, and was refused:

C'est d'ailleurs une étrange histoire que celle de cette *Paméla Giraud*. Présentée, dit-on, et refusée, il y a cinq ou six ans, à un théâtre de vaudevilles, elle s'est proménée

¹ Lovenjoul, *Histoire des œuvres de Balzac*, p. 222.

au travers de tout Paris, la pauvre fille abandonnée, cherchant quelque directeur charitable qui voulût bien donner asile à son infortune.²

During the years 1837 and 1838 Balzac was occupied with the stage solely as a means of paying off his pressing debts, and he talks a great deal about proposed plays. In February of 1837, he began *l'École des ménages*. In September of the same year it is a question of *Joseph Prudhomme*,³ to be written for the Théâtre Français. A survey of the plans for this play reveals fugitive traces of the melodrama which was later to resolve itself into *Paméla Giraud*. Paméla, in the proposed Prudhomme play, is the daughter of a poor janitor, who has a love affair with a young man who later deserts her and whose child she calls Adolphe, doubtless for its father. In 1838, while traveling in Corsica, Balzac read for the first time Richardson's *Pamela, or Virtue Rewarded*,⁴ and found the book "horriblement ennuyeux et bête." Nevertheless, Richardson's heroine, who is the soul of virtue itself, resisting the most violent of temptations and in the end rewarded, arrested Balzac's attention to the extent that he enlarged a bit on his story of the janitor's daughter, Paméla, later to become the wealthy Prudhomme's wife, and made her the heroine of a virtuous melodrama.⁵

In 1838, neither *Quinola* nor *Vautrin* had been written, and Balzac felt that he was a timid beginner, with the critics and the public against him. He consulted his friends on every occasion about his plays. In *l'Histoire du théâtre contemporain*, Royer recounts that on one occasion in a circle of friends Balzac remarked quite seriously:

Mes amis, j'ai terminé bientôt mon monument de la *Comédie humaine*; je vais bâtir en regard un autre édifice qui le complètera, je veux écrire un théâtre. Mais, comme on ne manquerait pas de trouver mes pièces détestables si l'on savait que j'en

² October 9, 1843.

³ See *supra*, pp. 24-26.

⁴ *LET.*, Vol. I, p. 471. April 1, 1838. Richardson's *Pamela* was published in 1740.

⁵ Several stage versions of Richardson's novel were made in France during the latter part of the eighteenth century, the two most important being: De Boissy, *Paméla, ou la vertu mieux éprouvée*, comedy in three acts, Théâtre Italien, May 4, 1743; La Chaussée, *Paméla*, comedy in five acts, Comédie Française, December 6, 1743. Voltaire's *Nanine*, comedy in three acts, Théâtre Français, June 16, 1789, also treats the same well-worn theme. In this latter comedy, we note certain elements which Balzac has also utilized in his melodrama: two lovers, one rich and impulsive, the other poor and of humble station; an overbearing member of the aristocracy in whom riches have stifled goodness; a virtuous and unjustly accused heroine; a defense of the innate goodness of poor people.

suis l'auteur, je prie l'un de vous de consentir à signer pour moi, au moins les premiers ouvrages.⁶

During all this early play-writing period, the striking facts to remember about his activity are: that he had not the time for a task which he ranked subordinate to novel writing, yet conceived as being the only solution to pressing financial troubles;⁷ that he did not at that time understand the composition of a play;⁸ and finally, that he was turning over in his mind quantities of scenic plans. Among them, no doubt, was the drama, *Paméla Giraud*, which, in its primitive state, was offered to some theatrical manager and refused, and which was thereupon laid away until it could be turned over to certain "gens de profession" and remodeled. In July of 1843 Balzac went to Russia for a few months' rest, mentally and physically worn.⁹ It was during this visit that the play was accepted by the Gaieté and produced.

In the published correspondence there is little or no mention of the present play: no discussion of it to Mme Hanska, whom the author consulted about so many of his dramatic schemes; no request for encouragement from the sympathetic sister, Laure. After the first moments of despair over *Vautrin*, Balzac turned his attentions feverishly to three other plays, and sought in vain to have them accepted by some theatre. The actor, Lemaître, turned down two of them, *Richard Cœur-d'éponge*¹⁰ and *Mercadet*,¹¹ while on July 3, 1840, the dramatist wrote to Mme Hanska:

Ah! chère, vous ne savez pas ce que c'est, après avoir fait quinze volumes en quinze mois, de faire seize actes de pièces de théâtre, comme *Paméla Giraud*, *Vautrin*, *Mercadet*, inutilement, car il n'y a plus d'espoir de faire rouvrir la Porte-Saint-Martin. Les procès qui se bataillent sur ce cercueil, empêchent tout. Les Français ferment pour trois mois pour se rafraîchir. La Renaissance est morte. Il n'y a pas un théâtre

⁶ Vol. V, 1878, p. 152.

⁷ "Je me suis trompé dans mes évaluations de dettes. On m'a donné cinquante mille francs; il m'en faut encore quatorze mille, puis sept mille pour une garantie imprudemment donnée pour Werdet. Mais je sens que le théâtre et deux belles œuvres me sauveraient. Il faut, pour faire deux pièces, me cacher en un lieu désert, inconnu, où personne ne me sache." *LEt.* Vol. I, p. 374. December 27, 1836.

⁸ While composing *l'École des ménages*, the author writes in 1838 to Mme Zulma Carraud: "J'attends quelque succès au théâtre; mais je n'ai pas encore eu le temps de méditer les pièces, ou de les exécuter comme je voudrais les voir." *Corr.*, p. 308.

⁹ *LEt.*, Vol. II, p. 184.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, Vol. I, p. 536. May 10, 1840.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 540. June, 1840.

où Frédéric puisse jouer. J'ai tenté le Vaudeville, dans sa nouvelle salle; mais le directeur n'a pas le sou.¹²

The following lines were addressed to Mme Hanska nearly a month after the first performance:

A propos d'accident, *Paméla Giraud*, qui porte mon nom, n'a pas été portée par mon nom; elle est tombée, à ce que je vois, et vous voyez qu'alors l'affaire a été très bonne pour moi. Dès que je serai de retour, j'expliquerai le fait par une pièce où je ne me contenterai pas de livrer mon idée à des faiseurs. Je viens de lire le feuilleton du *Courrier Français*; il n'est ni bien ni mal, mais il entre dans les questions anti-littéraires de l'argent et de la paternité douteuse, tandis qu'il sait probablement l'affaire telle qu'elle est.¹³

This statement seems to indicate that Balzac furnished merely the subject and the plan, leaving the actual construction of the play to collaborators. The fact of the matter is as follows: the complete play in five acts, as it is printed in the Calmann-Lévy edition of the works, was written by the hand of Balzac, and is identical with the original manuscript which is in the Lovenjoul collection at Chantilly. The original work by Balzac, however, overcharged with scenes and awkwardly handled action, was turned over for readjustment to professional dramatists before the actual stage production.¹⁴ Gautier, writing in *la Presse*, October 2, 1843, notes this collaboration as follows:

Il [Balzac] y a tellement réussi, qu'il ne serait pas impossible que la doloire et la biseigüe d'un charpentier émérite aient ajusté et raboté les poutres de son édifice dramatique.

This work of arrangement was given to two melodramatists, Bayard and Jaime, professionals who had already lent their assistance in the adaptation of three of the novels.¹⁵ The play as considered in this chapter is the original work conceived by Balzac before the polishers' tools had touched it.¹⁶

¹² *LEt.*, Vol. I, p. 543.

¹³ *Ibid.*, Vol. II, p. 199.

¹⁴ See *LEt.*, Vol. II, p. 199, editor's note: "*Paméla Giraud* avait été arrangée par MM. Bayard et Jaime, mais le manuscrit original complet existe de la main de Balzac." See also, *le Constitutionnel*, August 25, 1851; *le Courrier français*, October 9, 1843.

¹⁵ *La Fille de l'avare* adapted from *Eugénie Grandet*, by Bayard and Paulin, Gymnase, January 7, 1835; *A + Mz = O + X*, ou *le rêve d'un savant*, adapted from *la Recherche de l'absolu*, by M. X. (Bayard and Biéville), Gymnase, November 11, 1837; *le Père Goriot*, by Théaulon, Comberousse and Jaime, Variétés, April 6, 1835.

¹⁶ On January 28, 1917, *Paméla Giraud* was revived at the Odéon. An interesting review of the play is to be found in *l'Opinion*, February 3, 1917, by J. Ernest-Charles.

The action of the play takes place in 1815, after the second return of the Bourbons. The son of a rich banker has been drawn into an imperialistic plot against the government, moved by ambition rather than political preference to serve a power "higher up." A former officer of the first Empire, a certain General de Verby, is the real promoter of this conspiracy, and has promised Jules Rousseau a brilliant future, as well as the hand of his niece, if the plot is carried through successfully. Jules' thoughts have been somewhat turned from conspiring by the graces of a pretty girl, a maker of artificial flowers, whom he has met on various occasions at evening outings at Belleville. Paméla Giraud's affection for Jules is very real, and by means of it she has aroused the jealousy of a faithful upholsterer's apprentice, Joseph Binet by name, whom she has promised to marry. Jules has been suspected of plotting against the government, and at the opening of the play he is pursued by the police. He comes to Paméla's modest work-room to seek shelter, and to urge the girl to flee with him from Paris. But Binet, the jealous rival, overhears the lovers, and denounces Jules to the police. At the end of the first act Jules is led away to prison, charged with conspiracy.

From the humble attic of the Girauds we now pass to the fashionable home of Jules' parents, and we learn something further about the conspiracy with which the son of the family is charged. We are first presented to the Rousseaus: a pompous father and a tender, feeble-willed mother; Rousseau's sister, Mme du Brocard, a rich and arrogant grande dame, who is determined that her nephew shall marry the niece of de Verby; de Verby himself, a friend and counsellor of the family; also Jules' lawyer, Dupré, a misanthrope who is vainly searching Parisian society for an honest and upright man. As the case is discussed, Dupré does not conceal from the family the seriousness of Jules' position, but at the same time he has begun secretly to suspect de Verby of an intimate connection with the selfsame plot, and is determined to watch him. In order to save the youth, an alibi must be furnished. The scheme which Dupré conceives is none other than to have Paméla swear in court that the night on which Jules is accused of conspiring was spent with her. This defense meets instantly with the approval of the Rousseaus who agree to silence the virtuous Paméla's protests with ample pecuniary reward. The mother of Jules alone sees in such a sacrifice a more fitting reward for the girl whom her son adores.

In the third act, the advance guard has already hastened to the Giraud's home, and before Dupré is able to make a diplomatic proposal of his scheme, Mme du Brocard and de Verby have already outrageously bargained with Paméla to sell her good name for gold. The disgust which the honest girl expresses and the anger of her humble parents break down before the stronger and more humane arguments of Dupré. Paméla finally agrees to commit perjury in order to save her lover. Again the promises of money are renewed, while Mme Rousseau alone declares that she will receive the honest girl as her son's wife. But the conspirators have reckoned without the jealous Joseph. Concealed in the room, he has overheard the scheme, and threatens to reveal everything in court.

Paméla keeps her promise, however, and Joseph fails in his, for in the fourth act Jules comes up for trial, and Joseph, fascinated by Dupré's eloquence or by Rousseau's promise of money, corroborates the story fabricated at the expense of Paméla's honor. We are now in the home of Mme du Brocard, situated within sight of the Palais. Here the Rousseaus are gathered as the trial proceeds a stone's-throw away. From time to time news is brought to them from the court-room, and we learn that the trial is progressing well in Jules' favor. In measure as their fears diminish, the Rousseaus regain their former arrogance. The father no longer talks so glibly of renouncing half of his fortune as a reward to Paméla. Finally Jules is acquitted, and comes joyfully from the arms of justice to claim his savior. But he is reminded that he is already affianced to the niece of General de Verby, and is quickly dispatched by his family to Brussels for safe keeping. Dupré, disgusted with the egotism and heartlessness of the Rousseaus, threatens to disclose the whole plot, and to have Paméla arrested as a false witness. Instead of carrying out his threat—a threat to be sure which would involve the lawyer equally as much—Dupré decides to determine de Verby's part in the conspiracy and to settle with the Rousseaus by this means.

In the last act, the general's fears of being compromised lead him, as well as the Rousseaus, to yield to Dupré, and they agree to leave the question of a wife to their son's choice. In the meantime Dupré, who has deemed it wise to conceal Paméla and her family in his own house, has been so struck with admiration for the courage and sacrifice of the girl, that he asks her to become his wife. But the ardent Jules, chafing under his enforced exile, returns, while Dupré renounces his claim to the younger man. Thus virtue is rewarded, and Paméla wins a rich husband.

In the conception and execution of this play, Balzac has succeeded better than with *Vautrin* and *Quinola*. There are no exceptional types here, no embroiled intrigues, no strained and unnatural situations, none of the author's feverish haste to move his characters on and off stage. *Paméla Giraud* is a melodrama pure and simple, and there are the salient marks of the melodrama throughout the composition of the play: characters hidden behind curtains and conversations overheard; frequent asides, in which the actors express the pent-up feelings of their audience; a letter read by the heroine which hints at a mysterious danger pursuing the hero. There are also violent bits of hurried dialogue, tending to create suspense. Paméla is about to yield to Jules's entreaties to leave her home, when the latter cries out: "On monte. . . Je suis perdu! . . . vous m'avez livré!"^{16a} With the house surrounded by the police, Jules makes a hurried confession of his love to Paméla's parents, and is accepted. There is undoubtedly an appeal to the pit in Giraud's cry:

Ma fille, notre trésor, c'est la gloire de nos vieux jours, et vous voulez que nous la déshonorions! Non, madame. Ma fille, c'est l'espoir de mes cheveux blancs.¹⁷

In like fashion Paméla addresses the Rousseaus:

Vous êtes venus ici, chez de pauvres gens, et vous ne saviez pas ce que vous leur demandiez. . . Vous, madame, qui deviez le savoir, quels que soient le rang, l'éducation, l'honneur d'une femme est son trésor! ce que dans vos familles vous conservez avec tant de soin, tant de respect, vous avez cru qu'ici, dans une mansarde, on le vendrait! et vous vous êtes dit: "Offrons de l'or! il nous faut l'honneur d'une grisette!"¹⁸

The pathetic situations are stressed to the utmost. Giraud with tearful voice thanks his daughter's protector as follows:

Vous. . . le premier des hommes! . . . Eh bien! moi et ma femme, nous irons nous cacher, n'est-ce pas, la vieille? . . . dans une campagne bien loin! . . . et le dimanche, à l'heure de la messe, vous direz: "Ils sont tous les deux qui prient le bon Dieu pour moi. . . et pour leur fille."¹⁹

The aim of the author was to hold the attention of the boulevard audience, and he made use of many well-practiced schemes to do this. But in the composition Balzac has exercised a vast amount of skill in holding the spectators' attention: for example, the close of the third act, after Paméla has consented to save Jules, and Joseph

^{16a} Act I, scene 2.

¹⁷ Act III, scene 4.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ Act V, scene 1.

threatens to reveal the whole affair; the skillfully managed suspense during the fourth act, when the outcome of the trial hangs in a balance. Here Balzac has produced a strikingly dramatic scene, showing how the anxiety of the Rousseaus over the fate of their son is marked by their eager promises of reward; how these promises decrease as their anxiety decreases. After Paméla has delivered her testimony, Rousseau declares: "Je n'oublierai pas cette jeune fille; elle avait l'intention de nous être utile; elle peut passer à ma caisse quand elle vaudra pour toucher mille écus." No longer is there talk of sacrificing half of his fortune, for Jules is now safe. "Cette petite a été charmante dans sa déposition," says the wealthy aunt. "Allons, il faut être juste, cela vaut bien trente mille francs!" The whole scene is excellently handled, and well worthy of the author of the Human Comedy.

With the fourth act the drama ends, and the remainder of the play changes its tone to that of comedy. Here Balzac has employed the old stage artifice of hiding the characters one by one, so that they may have the discomfiting experience of hearing themselves talked about in no amiable fashion by the others, and are finally revealed to one another, and are left to wrangle and bicker to their heart's content.

The characters also bear the stamp of the melodrama: a romantic lover, rich and in danger, who pleads with his mistress to flee with him to a foreign land; a common girl who does a noble deed, and suffers thereby, but is in the end rewarded; a magnanimous protector, whose heart is softened by the girl's misery; "gens du monde," heartless and ridiculous.

Like the heroine of *La Chaussée* or *Sedaine*, Paméla is sentimental and prone to tears, virtuous to the discredit of the aristocracy with whom her lot is thrown. She is forced to endure untold sufferings. When urged by her parents to accept the hand of Joseph, she faces them as Eugénie Grandet does her miserly father, with defiance: "Je suis majeure. . .maitresse de mes actions."²⁰ When she is insulted by Mme du Brocard, she cries to the topmost gallery:

²⁰ Act I, scene 3. Compare *Eugénie Grandet*: "Mon père je vous aime et vous respecte, malgré votre colère; mais je vous ferai fort humblement observer que j'ai vingt-deux ans. Vous m'avez assez souvent dit que je suis majeure pour que je le sache."

"Dieu merci, je sais me respecter!"²¹ Sentimental also is the sensitive, high-strung son of the Rousseaus, known to his mistress as Adolphe Durand—"un joli nom. . . la moitié d'un roman."²² Jules is also a romantic lover, rich, ardent and impulsive:

Je vous aime, je suis riche, et nous ne nous quitterons jamais.²³

He is not only the impulsive lover, but he is also in grave danger, an additional characteristic of the hero of the melodrama.

Associated intimately with the Rousseau family is the General de Verby, "ancien officier du Premier Empire," an ardent Bonapartist and a brother of a peer of France. Ambitious and prudent, with no sense of honor or integrity, eager to boast of glory and patriotism to a *cause*, he becomes the object of suspicion from the very start. We can recognize in this crafty and ambitious figure traces of another creation of Balzac. De Verby is a continuation of Maxence Gilet, that unscrupulous champion of Bonapartism, whose career was checked in its prime by the sword of Philippe Bridau.²⁴ De Verby is Maxence Gilet in after life, still the master of political shrewdness which would do honor to a Borgia, still retaining the bearing of a former captain of the Guards, now lifted to a higher social rank, the brother of a "gentilhomme de la chambre," obsequious and wealthy.

As the General de Verby suggests Maxence Gilet to us, so the lawyer Dupré brings to mind the solicitor who has appeared on so many of Balzac's pages, Derville.²⁵ Dupré is a man of wealth and good practice, forty-eight years old. His contact with Parisian society has left him cold and bitter. In all his twenty years of practice he has yet to meet human hearts "exempts de calculs."²⁶ His outlook on the world is consequently that of a misanthrope, based on a long observation of people and manners. To Mme Rousseau he declares:

Je vous le jure, rien n'excite plus ma curiosité, ma sympathie, qu'un sentiment réel, et à Paris le vrai est si rare, que je ne saurais rester insensible à la douleur d'une famille menacée de perdre un fils unique.²⁷

²¹ Act III, scene 4.

²² Act I, scene 1.

²³ Act I, scene 2.

²⁴ *Les Deux Frères*, published in part in *la Presse*, in 1841; title changed to *la Rabouilleuse* in the definitive edition of 1869.

²⁵ See *Gobseck*, 1830; *Colonel Chabert*, 1832; *le Père Goriot*, 1834; *Une Ténébreuse Affaire*, 1841; *Un Début dans la vie*, 1842.

²⁶ Act II, scene 6.

²⁷ Act II, scene 3.

Jules' case interests him as a problem to solve; he is concerned not only with freeing the boy, but also with convicting the person whom he believes to head the conspiracy:

Je le crois la dupe de gens situés dans une région supérieure, et j'aime les dupes quand elles le sont noblement et non victimes de secrets calculs. . . car nous sommes dans un siècle où la dupe est aussi avide que celui qui l'exploite.²⁸

In Dupré's contact with the world, moreover, he has been an outsider:

Je n'estime pas assez les hommes pour les haïr, car je n'ai rencontré personne que je pusse aimer.²⁹

Finally, the generosity and nobility of heart which he has sought in vain, are revealed to him by a poor working girl whom he wishes to make his wife.

Dupré is unmistakably modeled after Derville. The latter, a modest man of high probity and culture, frequents the society of the Faubourg Saint-Germain, and is thoroughly at home in the "beau monde." In early life, at the beginning of his career, he has made the acquaintance of the philosophic money-lender, Gobseck; and through his eyes he has looked into all the cesspools of Paris. Gradually, his own philosophy is shaped by this crafty old miser, whose great scorn for humanity has been engendered by watching the disastrous effects of lust and ambition upon the human heart. Like Dupré, society presents to Derville a picture of selfishness, self-interest and depraved manners, and he cries out: "Paris me fait horreur!"³⁰ After following the unhappy destiny of Colonel Chabert to its close, he moralizes in no delicate words over the hideous sights which a lawyer is forced to witness:

Nous voyons se répéter les mêmes sentiments mauvais, rien ne les corrige, nos études sont des égouts qu'on ne peut pas curer.³¹

Derville's choice of a wife, like Dupré's, is from the ranks of the humble, and he is happily married to a Parisian dress-maker.³² As the renunciation of Colonel Chabert rights Derville with the world, so Paméla's love and sacrifice serve to reconcile Dupré, and he asks her to become his wife.

²⁸ Act II, scene 6.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ *Colonel Chabert.*

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² *Gobseck.*

In *Paméla Giraud* Balzac has succeeded in making a good melodrama. The action is simple and straightforward, unhampered by digressions. The dramatic struggle is centered about two conflicting classes of society which the author of the Human Comedy has described in so many of his novels: a wealthy and commercial class, which has rapidly covered its vulgar exterior with a varnish of aristocracy, and a humble honest class of the petits bourgeois. Balzac has also maintained during at least four of the acts the interest of the spectator by well developed situations and vivacious dialogue, the latter a marked improvement over that of the plays already studied.

VII

LA MARATRE

Upon his return from Russia in 1848, Balzac sent for Hostein, the director of the Théâtre Historique, and handed over to him a five-act play entitled *Gertrude, tragédie bourgeoise*. The principal rôle had been written for Mme Dorval. The proposed distribution also included the leading artists of the Théâtre Historique, among whom were Mélingue, formerly of the Ambigu-Comique, Mathis and Barré. The play was accepted and immediately read to the company. Hostein relates¹ that after the second act the action was so overloaded with detail that it was impossible to go on. Dorval objected to the name, and to the suicide of the stepdaughter. Certain modifications were immediately made, notably in the name, which was changed to *la Marâtre*, and the rehearsals were begun. Mme Périer, wife of Lacressonnière, replaced Mme Dorval, who was obliged to resign the rôle of Gertrude because of ill-health.²

The play, entitled "un drame intime en cinq actes et huit tableaux," had its initial performance at the Théâtre Historique on May 25, 1848. It was published the same year, a brochure in-12, by Michel Lévy.

"Il suffit à un jeune homme de rencontrer une femme qui ne l'aime pas, ou une femme qui l'aime trop, pour que toute sa vie soit dérangée," writes Balzac in *la Peau de chagrin*.³ *La Marâtre* is the history of a woman who loves too much, and who wrecks not only the life of the man she loves, but the happiness of her family as well.

Mlle Gertrude de Meilhac, an orphan, brought up in the convent of Saint-Denis, forms, when still a girl in her teens, an attachment for the son of a former lieutenant-general of Napoleon's army, at one time the commander of the royal guard. The son inherits a fortune from his father, and the ambitious orphan girl sees in this union a golden future of ease and happiness. After the Hundred Days, the family of Ferdinand Marcandal is ruined, and the pampered, luxury-loving son, poetic and artistic, is thrown into the world without a penny. Gertrude, far from abandoning her ambition,

¹ *Historiettes et souvenirs d'un homme de théâtre*, 1878.

² Mme Dorval died the following year, May 29, 1849.

³ *Œuvres*, Vol. XV, p. 139.

turns from her first love to a wealthy general of fifty-eight, who is seeking a governess for his motherless daughter. "Elle n'a vu dans ce vieux soldat qu'un coffre-fort."⁴ With dreams of an early widowhood and a fortune to spend, Gertrude accepts the General Count de Grandchamp's offer, not as governess, but as wife. She has been married for twelve years, and she is only thirty-two years old at the opening of the play. The old flame of passion for her romantic young lover of former days has never deserted her. Awaiting her husband's decease, she has caused Ferdinand to come into her home, and has secured for him a trusted position in her husband's employ. With the entrance of the lover into this quiet Norman family, the drama begins. We discover first that the General, a devoted husband and a doting father, is consumed with a passionate love for the memory of Bonaparte under whom he has served, and whose fate has awakened in him an everlasting thirst for vengeance on those "traitors" who have brought it about. In the very bosom of his family one of these traitors is lodged. To be sure, Ferdinand has taken his mother's name, and has given no hint of his real origin. But his relations with the General's family have latterly become still more intimate. Unresponsive to the wife's charms, Ferdinand has fallen in love with the daughter. Fearing this catastrophe, Gertrude, soon to become her stepdaughter's bitter rival, tries to hasten the marriage which has been arranged for Pauline to an aged suiter, a wealthy land-owner named Godard, or Godard de Rimonsville, as he likes to be called.

There is quiet, almost idyllic dignity about the opening scenes of the drama: the gathering of the family at the dinner hour; the usual banter between the General and his old friend, Godard; the appearance of the young daughter on her stepmother's arm; the family doctor, Vernon, and the little son, Gertrude's boy, Napoléon. The character of the stepmother begins to develop in all of its repulsiveness. A tragedy has occurred in the General's factory which disturbs the tranquillity of the dinner guests. A foreman, who has been accused of poisoning his wife, is brought into the house to face the officers of justice. The man is known to have bought arsenic, but he protests that his purchase was made for Gertrude, and declares that his wife died a natural death. His statements are borne out, first by Doctor Vernon, who has diagnosed the woman's disease as

⁴ Act I, scene 8.

cholera, and then by Gertrude, who produces the package of arsenic with intact labels. Upon this evidence of innocence, the man is freed, but there is a presentiment about the prosecutor's warning to him, which seems to foreshadow an impending tragedy:

Vous voyez mon ami, à quels fâcheux soupçons on est exposé, quand on fait mauvais ménage. . . Ceux qui vivent sans reproche, qui n'ont que des passions nobles, avouables, n'ont jamais rien à redouter de la justice.⁵

The family now returns to its coffee and after-dinner conversation.

Godard, who has been rejected by Pauline, takes occasion at this moment to play a rather stupid trick on the girl to discover whether she is really in love with Ferdinand or not. He tells the little Napoléon to announce brusquely to the assembled family that Ferdinand has broken his leg. The little joke has far-reaching results. With a cry of pain, Pauline sinks into her chair as the child tells his petty falsehood:

Gertrude, à Godard, a qui elle tend un petit verre: Savez-vous, monsieur, que vous seriez un détestable précepteur! C'est bien mal à vous d'apprendre de semblables méchancetés à un enfant.

Godard: Vous trouverez que j'ai très-bien fait, quand vous saurez que, par ce petit stratagème de société, j'ai pu découvrir mon rival. (*Il montre Ferdinand, qui entre*).

Gertrude, elle laisse tomber le sucrier: Lui!

Godard, à part: Elle aussi!⁶

The clouds have now gathered, and the storm is ready to break. Sarcey, speaking of the incident of the breaking of the sugar-bowl, says:

C'est qu'avec lui tombe en morceaux le masque de paix et de bonheur sous lequel se cachaient des passions perverses et que nous savons implacables.⁷

The struggle between stepmother and daughter has begun. With naturalness the scene closes about the whist table, and the little boy is sent off to bed:

Gertrude: Pauline, ma fille, présente les cartes à ces messieurs pour le whist. Il est bientôt neuf heures; s'ils veulent faire leur partie, il ne faut pas perdre de temps. (*Pauline arrange les cartes.*) Allons, Napoléon, dites bonsoir à ces messieurs, et donnez bonne opinion de vous, en ne gaminant pas comme vous faites tous les soirs.

Napoléon: Bonsoir, papa. Comment donc est faite la justice?

Le Général: Comme un aveugle! Bonne nuit, mon mignon!

⁵ Act II, scene 3.

⁶ Act II, scene 4.

⁷ *Quarante Ans de théâtre*, Vol. IV, pp. 187-93, article *la Marâtre*; originally appeared in *l'Opinion nationale*, September 12, 1859.

Napoléon: Bonsoir, monsieur Vernon! De quoi est donc faite la justice?

Vernon: De tous nos crimes. Quand tu as commis une sottise, on te donne le fouet; voilà la justice.

Napoléon: Je n'ai jamais eu le fouet.

Vernon: On ne t'a jamais fait justice, alors!

Napoléon: Bonsoir, mon bon ami!—Bonsoir, Pauline!—Adieu, monsieur Godard. . . .

Godard: De Rimonville.

Napoléon: Ai-je été gentil? (*Gertrude l'embrasse.*)

Le Général: J'ai le roi.

Vernon: Moi, la dame.

Ferdinand, à Godard: Monsieur, nous sommes ensemble.

Gertrude, voyant Marguerite: Dis bien tes prières, ne fais pas enrager Marguerite. . . . Va, cher amour.

Napoléon: Tiens, cher amour! . . . en quoi c'est-y fait l'amour? (*Il s'en va.*)

As the whist game goes on, the two women are left together. Gertrude must learn the truth of Godard's assertion, but her questioning only serves to put the girl on her guard. The party breaks up for the night, and finally father and daughter are left alone. The motherless girl, no longer able to trust her stepmother, seeks in vain to confess the story of her love to the old man, but an immense barrier separates them, for Ferdinand is the son of a hated traitor.

The scene changes, and we see a meeting between the two lovers at midnight. Ferdinand tells Pauline the wretched story about her stepmother, how she has loved him in the past, and how he has returned this love. He gives her as further proof the passionate letters which Gertrude formerly wrote to him. But they are overheard by Gertrude, who finally faces Pauline with defiance, and lays bare her soul in all its hideousness to the girl.⁸

The third act opens on the morning following the stormy interview between the two women. Gertrude after a sleepless night turns to Ferdinand and tries to justify her conduct. She confesses without shame her violent nature, and pleads with her former lover to return her affection. She offers even to renounce her home if he will consent to flee with her. Ferdinand is only able to repeat that he no longer loves her. It is then that Gertrude determines to wreck the lives of the two youthful lovers. She persuades her

⁸ In our own day, this scene has been reproduced with striking force by Sir Arthur Pinero, when the second Mrs Tanqueray appears in her true light as the former mistress of her stepdaughter's affianced. But Gertrude's taint is much deeper than Mrs. Tanqueray's; she is the jealous rival of her daughter, while Pinero's heroine has long since renounced this passion, and it is only an evil chance that has thrown it again across her path.—*The Second Mrs Tanqueray*, produced first at London, May 27, 1893.

husband that Pauline loves Ferdinand, and that they should marry, knowing that Ferdinand's identity will thus become known to the General. In the meanwhile, the young man, who realizes the hopelessness of his situation, thinks of leaving France, and of seeking his fortune in America. The two women are left face to face to wage a heartless and brutal warfare. "Selon mon père," says Pauline, "la guerre entre gens civilisés a ses lois; mais la guerre que vous me faites, madame, est celle des sauvages."⁹ So be it. The young girl determines to fight Gertrude with her own weapons. She threatens her with the letters. Gertrude, aware that Pauline has these upon her person, determines to obtain them at all costs. She puts opium in her tea. Pauline, overcome by the opiate, is carried to her room, but Gertrude's act has been noticed by Doctor Vernon. The latter, obtaining the poisoned teacup, locks it in a closet as future evidence. Aware of the hostility between the two women, the good doctor questions them both in an effort to clear up the troubled domestic clouds. But Pauline is unwilling to mention the letters, seeking to avert dishonor to her father's name. Instead, she determines to leave home with Ferdinand, a thing which in any case would bring greater dishonor to her family! As she is about to depart, Gertrude, who has overheard the whole plot—a frequent occurrence in the play—interposes herself between the two lovers. She threatens now to reveal Ferdinand's identity to the General. In desperation, Pauline agrees to marry Godard. Instead, she surreptitiously steals the package of arsenic from Gertrude's desk, and with it puts an end to her life. Again, justice, with all its grimness, enters the General de Grandchamp's house, for the wrapper from the arsenic package, which was once the means of proving innocence, now points to guilt, and Gertrude is accused of her stepdaughter's murder. But Pauline, on her death-bed, confesses her act of suicide in the presence of her family. Ferdinand, unwilling to live without his sweetheart, reveals his real name, and shares the poisoned cup. With overwhelming force, the truths which have been so well-guarded from the father, are made plain to him, one by one, and the curtain falls on the broken old man, stammering prayers by his daughter's death-bed.

As it appears from the summary of the action of *la Marâtre*, there is a vast difference in quality between the first two acts and

⁹ Act III, scene 7.

the rest of the play. The two are infinitely superior to the others, and display a certain knowledge of dramatic construction on the part of the author. Although we cannot accept the high praise which Biré has allowed it,¹⁰ the second act is especially worthy of the author of the Human Comedy. The essential dramatic struggle is announced clearly, and with precision: the opposition between peaceful daily life and passions at the breaking-point; between devoted family ties and insidious jealousy. Balzac has made reality his point of departure. Hostein relates in his *Historiettes et souvenirs d'un homme de théâtre* an interesting page about the composition of the play:

Je le priai de me dire, si cela était possible, quelques mots du sujet nouveau qu'il nous destinait.

—Ce sera une chose atroce, reprit Balzac. . . .

—Comment, atroce?

—Entendons-nous, il ne s'agit pas d'un gros mélodrame où le traître brûle les maisons et perfore à outrance les habitants. Non, je rêve une comédie de salon où tout est calme, tranquille, aimable. Les hommes jouent placidement au whist, à la clarté de bougies surmontées de leurs petits abat-jour verts. Les femmes causent et rient en travaillant à des ouvrages de broderie. On prend un thé patriarcal. En un mot, tout annonce la règle et l'harmonie. Eh bien, là-dessous les passions s'agitent, le drame marche et couve, jusqu'à ce qu'il éclate comme la flamme d'un incendie. Voilà ce que je veux.

—Vous êtes dans votre élément, maître. Alors, votre donnée est trouvée?

—Complètement. C'est le hasard, notre collaborateur habituel, qui me l'a fournie. Je connais une famille—je ne la nommerai pas—composée d'un mari, d'une fille que le mari a eue d'une première union, et d'une belle-mère, jeune encore et sans enfant. Les deux femmes s'adorent. Les soins empressés de l'une, la tendresse mignonne et caressante de l'autre font l'admiration de l'entourage.

Moi aussi, j'ai trouvé cela charmant. . . d'abord. Ensuite, je me suis étonné, non point qu'une belle-mère et sa bru fussent bien ensemble—cela n'est pas précisément contre nature—mais qu'elles fussent trop bien. L'excès gâte tout.

Malgré moi, je me pris à observer; quelques incidents futiles me maintinrent dans mon idée. Enfin, une circonstance plus grave m'a prouvé, un de ces derniers soirs, que je n'avais point porté un jugement téméraire.

Comme je me présentais dans le salon à une heure où il ne s'y trouvait presque plus personne, je vis la bru sortir sans m'avoir remarqué. Elle regardait sa belle-mère. Quel regard! Quelque chose comme un coup de stylet. La belle-mère était occupée à éteindre les bougies de la table de whist. Elle se retourna du côté de sa

¹⁰ "Le second acte n'est pas moins remarquable que le premier. Il renferme une scène qui est, à coup sûr, l'une des plus belles du théâtre contemporain." (La scène de la partie de whist.)

"Les deux premiers actes confinaient au chef-d'œuvre; même dans les trois derniers, que de scènes d'intérêt poignant!"—*Honoré de Balzac*, pp. 243, 245.

belle-fille; leurs yeux se rencontrèrent, et le plus gracieux sourire se dessina en même temps sur leurs lèvres. La porte s'étant refermée sur la bru, l'expression du visage de l'autre femme se changea subitement en une amère contraction.

Tout cela prit, vous le pensez bien, le temps d'un éclair, mais ce temps m'avait suffi. Je me dis: Voilà deux créatures qui s'exècrent!—Que venait-il de se passer? Je n'en sais rien, jamais je ne voudrai le savoir; mais, partant de là, un drame tout entier se déroula dans mon esprit.

The exchange of a glance between two hostile women, and his drama was conceived. He has made observation the starting-point. For treatment he has chosen a comfortable Norman family, and has striven by careful emphasis on material setting, by observation of intimate details of character delineation to give to this setting an impression of truth. Here we note the powerful imagination of Balzac at work; he perceives in the twinkling of an eye the dramatic possibilities of his situation; a detail, seized haphazard, leads to the building up of an intrigue, to the essential "scènes à faire."

Balzac, making reality his point of departure, has, however, developed his play in a manner that is only feebly realistic. The incidents and the thread of the action are very unreal. In the first place, the author's methods of creating situations are awkward and too apparent. The accusation of the workman at the beginning of the play serve merely to prove that the package of arsenic purchased by Gertrude is at that moment sealed, an important bit of evidence against her at the end of the play. Godard's trick to discover whether Pauline loves Ferdinand is stupid and dramatically poor. The same awkward device is employed by Gertrude when she tells Pauline that Ferdinand is married. The incriminating tea-cup which Vernon has obtained from Pauline is like lead in his hands until he locks it in a closet of which he has, strangely enough, the key. Gertrude drops the key to her desk in which the arsenic is hidden just at the moment that Pauline decides to kill herself. Later Pauline returns the key to her stepmother's pocket, an act which will throw suspicion upon Gertrude.

In addition to certain undramatic situations, Balzac has spoiled the unity of his composition by the constant use of asides and eavesdropping. Gertrude resorts to this latter trick constantly: she spies upon Pauline and the General; she overhears all that the two lovers say. The excessive talk about exact sums of money and about incomes is also a tedious proceeding of the author throughout the play. All these minute details of finance were thoroughly realistic to the mind of Balzac; he believed them to be a necessary phase of

his characters' lives, just as much so as his own "comptes drolatiques" were to him. But these details are undramatic, and a useless bit of padding. Without doubt, the daughter's fortune—350,000 francs from mother and uncle plus interest, making 367,000 francs, which her father will increase to 400,000 francs upon her marriage—was one of the excessive details which Mme Dorval wished to dispose of at the first reading of the play!

"On avance dans ce drame ainsi qu'en un rêve affreux,"¹¹ writes Sarcey in his review of the play. With the beginning of the third act, the "tragédie bourgeoise" fades into obscurity, and we are transported abruptly into the realm of the melodrama. Gertrude offering to leave her home with Ferdinand; the scenes of hysterical violence between the two women; the pathetic figure of Gertrude's innocent little boy; the final suicide of the two lovers, are all appeals to the most vulgar boulevard tastes. The language changes in tone from the naturalness of the tea-table scene, already cited, to violent expressions of hatred, anger and pathos. Gertrude says to Ferdinand: "Je n'avais pour vous que des regards pleins de tendresse, une physionomie gaie,"¹² and a few moments later:

La folie, avec ses rêves insensés, danse autour de ma cervelle! . . . Le meurtre m'agite les doigts. . . C'est dans ces moments-là qu'on tue! . . . Ah! comme je la tuerais! . . . Oh! mon Dieu! mon Dieu! ne m'abandonnez pas, laissez-moi ma raison! . . . Voyons!¹³

Gertrude at her husband's mercy in the last act cries out:

Mon ami! . . . pauvre père! . . . Ah! je voudrais que l'on me tuât à l'instant sans procès. . . Non, Pauline m'a enveloppée dans son suaire, et je sens ses doigts glacés autour de mon cou. . . Oh! j'étais résignée! j'allais, oui, j'allais ensevelir avec moi le secret de ce drame domestique, épouvantable, et que toutes les femmes devraient connaître! mais je suis lasse de cette lutte avec un cadavre qui m'étreint, qui me communique la mort! Eh bien! mon innocence sortira victorieuse de ces aveux aux dépens de l'honneur; mais je ne serai pas du moins une lâche et vile empoisonneuse. Ah! je vais tout dire.¹⁴

Turning to the characters, we find a surprising diversity in their quality also. In the General Count de Grandchamp, former officer under the Empire, colonel of the "jeune garde," seventy years old,

¹¹ *Quarante ans de théâtre*, Vol. IV, p. 191.

¹² Act III, scene 2.

¹³ Act III, scene 7.

¹⁴ Act V, scene 10.

twenty-six campaigns and eleven wounds—one of them at Waterloo—Balzac has incarnated loyalty to a lost cause. Much has already been written about his treatment of Napoleon.¹⁵ From *la Vendetta* and *la Femme de trente ans*, both written in 1830, to *Une Ténébreuse Affaire* in 1841, Napoleon appeared in various phases throughout the novels; from Colonel Chabert, whose ardor for the Emperor amounted to a tremendous passion, to Philippe Bridau, Balzac had expressed in his characters an intense admiration for the man. When he came to consecrate his memory upon the stage in the figure of this faithful follower, General de Grandchamp, he was following moreover the vogue of almost every dramatist, great and small, of his day. The keynote to the character is devotion: devotion first of all to God, then to his Emperor, and then to his family:

Vraiment, le bon Dieu me devait ma Gertrude, ne fût-ce que pour me consoler de la chute et de la mort de l'empereur!¹⁶

To his little son he has given the name, Napoléon. But devotion to his family has robbed the old soldier of all subtlety of character, and he is aware of none of the tragic events which take place under his very eyes. Balzac has noted with insistent care the contrast between the kindly nature of the General and the violence of his wife. At the moment when Gertrude is sharpening her most deadly weapons, the General is blissfully happy, and kisses her hand, saying: "Que tu es bonne!"¹⁷ This character of the old "groggnard," a good father, brave and honest, is scarcely more than a conventional type common to a great many plays of the day. Conventional and pale also is the country doctor Vernon. Godard, the sound and honest Norman farmer, is drawn with some realistic care. He is the General's jovial friend, awkward over the tea-table and in his declarations of love, much more at ease when he is discussing good pasture lands in the valley of the Auge and his mortgages. Of humble origin, he is constantly reminded by the General that his father was "un fort honnête homme qui menait ses bœufs lui-même de Caen à Poissy, et qui s'appelait sur toute la route Godard, le père Godard."¹⁸

Balzac has been more careful in his presentation of the General's daughter, Pauline. This twenty-two-year-old girl, inheriting from

¹⁵ See especially Biré, *Honoré de Balzac*, pp. 24-76.

¹⁶ Act I, scene 2.

¹⁷ Act III, scene 5.

¹⁸ Act I, scene 3.

her father all the violence of his nature, brought up without the tender care of a mother, is suddenly confronted with the hideous spectacle of her stepmother's lust. There is no person to whom she may confide her trouble, or from whom she may seek comfort. Gradually sinking under the weight of treachery and cunning which is forced upon her, she takes refuge in her stepmother's own weapons, until finally she is hounded out of her senses, and takes her own life. As Biré has pointed out,¹⁹ Pauline is no "jeune première de convention." Like Anna, in *l'École des ménages*, she has a will of her own, and a certain cunning outlook upon the world, the result of her lonely life. Like Anna, also, Pauline loves and hates with equal fervor, and her passions are too apparent, expressed with too much vigor to correspond to reality, so that both figures sink to the realm of the melodrama.

In Gertrude, Balzac has given us merely a "femme fatale" of the melodrama. This woman, with the exterior of a devoted wife and mother, lavishing fond care upon her son and obedient to her husband's smallest requests, conceals for her former lover a strong criminal passion which works ruin within her home. What is really terrible about the character is the ascendancy which she gains over her innocent victim, dragging Pauline after her into the mire of vulgar subterfuge, deceit and cunning. When her adulterous soul has been laid bare to her stepdaughter, she sinks rapidly in self-esteem. Her speech becomes vulgar:

Les hommes ne se croient aimés que quand ils nous ont fait tomber dans la fange! Et voilà comme il me récompense! il a des rendez-vous la nuit avec cette sottise de fille.²⁰

Her reproaches to Ferdinand and her inflammable retorts to the honest Godard would do justice to a woman of the streets. Gertrude is an excessive creation, with all the faults and all the vices of the melodrama, a character of no complexity or originality. Nor has Balzac been more careful with the character of the lover, who remains under the author's pen an unfinished figure. A trusted friend who violates all the sacred laws of hospitality, and doubly betrays his protector's trust, he is but sketchily drawn, and Balzac has taken little pains with him. He is inconsistent to the extreme—one moment vowing eternal vengeance upon his former mistress because she stands in the way of his suit; the next, declaring his sincere,

¹⁹ *Honoré de Balzac*, p. 246.

²⁰ Act III, scene 1.

devoted and absolute friendship.²¹ Spied upon, living in constant fear of detection, he cuts a sorry figure, and is little else than the conventional "jeune premier." Balzac has wished to make a sympathetic character of him, but his conduct does not inspire sympathy, and Gertrude's reproaches to him are well deserved.

Balzac's conception of his family tragedy, inspired by the exchange of jealous glances between two women, shows boldness and originality. The dramatic situation which he has developed, that of a lover placed between two women, one older and one younger, is by no means original with him. At least two of the elder Dumas' dramas center about this same triangular action: *Teresa* and *Angèle*.²² In the latter play Alfred d'Alvimar, the ruined son of a family which was formerly wealthy, is on the point of marrying the Countess de Gaston after he has compromised the daughter. In *Teresa* there are much closer resemblances to *la Marâtre*. In this play, the Baron Delaunay, a colonel of the Empire, marries late in life a beautiful Neopolitan, Teresa. This youthful woman, like Gertrude, has had a former lover, Arthur, who proves to be affianced to her stepdaughter. Arthur, moreover, like Ferdinand, is a royalist, to whom Delaunay has with difficulty become reconciled:

Son père combattait pour un homme; moi, je combattais pour la France! . . . Tout homme qui porte les armes contre son pays est un traître. . . et son fils est un fils de traître!²³

In this play the same wicked jealousy develops unknown to the old soldier, but here the adulterous passion is reversed, for it is Arthur who seeks to renew his former love, while the stepmother is generous, seeking to spare her husband. The struggle in *la Marâtre* is essentially between two women, while Dumas has centered it about father-in-law and son-in-law. Balzac's veteran general, whose consolation for Napoleon's downfall has been a young wife, unmistakably suggests Delaunay, who has followed his leader's bloody

²¹ Act II, scene 10; act III, scene 2.

²² *Théâtre complet d'Alexandre Dumas*, vol. II and III. Paris, Michel Lévy, 1863. *Teresa*, a prose drama in five acts, Salle Ventadour, February 6, 1832; *Angèle*, a prose drama in five acts, Porte-Saint-Martin, December 28, 1833; both plays written in collaboration with Anicet Bourgeois.

²³ Act IV, scene 13.

trail across Europe.²⁴ General de Grandchamp speaks of his wife in almost the same terms as Delaunay:

Godard, un ange à qui vous devez l'éducation de votre future; elle l'a faite à son image. Pauline est une perle, un bijou; ça n'a pas quitté la maison, c'est pur, innocent, comme dans le berceau.²⁵

In like manner Delaunay describes his new wife to his daughter:

Je rencontraï un ange d'amour et de pureté, que je ne puis comparer qu'à toi, mon enfant.²⁶

Souvenirs of *Teresa* seem unmistakably present in *la Marâtre*. That Balzac was intentionally borrowing a situation or a character from Dumas, we are unable to say. The fact remains, that *la Marâtre* was written for Hostein and the Théâtre Historique at the moment when Dumas was composing solely for that theatre, and was immensely popular.²⁷ Perhaps Balzac, in his eagerness to compete with Dumas and to succeed as he had done, studied the sources of his success, and unconsciously took from one or more of the plays a situation and a scene or two to develop.

An American journalist, Walter Littlefield, remarks that *la Marâtre* just misses being the forerunner of the modern French realistic drama. "In it," he continues, "had Balzac been as true to himself in incident and dialogue as he was in abstractly sketching a drama of great human passion, he might, and very certainly would, have produced a masterpiece of its kind."²⁸ In this play Balzac has returned to the domestic tragedy with which he began his real theatrical period. As in *l'Ecole des ménages*, he has attempted the study of bourgeois family life in which violent passions are at work. In his first play, it is a father's passion for a girl in his employ; in *la Marâtre*, a mother's passion for her husband's clerk. In both plays the family ruin involves a young daughter whose character is misshapen by the wretched plight of her parents; and it is the exercise of this daughter's will that brings about the catastrophe. Just as *l'Ecole des ménages* is a hybrid production, half-way between the bourgeois tragedy and the melodrama, so *la Marâtre* gives way after the first two acts to romanticism, filled with clumsy action and excessive personages.

²⁴ Act II, scene 5.

²⁵ Act I, scene 3.

²⁶ Act II, scene 5.

²⁷ In 1847, after opening with *la Reine Margot*, February 20, the Théâtre Historique presented the following plays of Dumas: *Intrigue et amour*, June 11; *le Chevalier de Maison-Rouge*, August 3; *Hamlet*, December 15; in 1848, *Monte-Cristo*, first part, February 3; *Monte-Cristo*, second part, February 4; *Catilina*, October 14.

²⁸ *The Critic*, September 1902, p. 250.

VIII

MERCADET

In 1839, during his negotiations with the Renaissance Theatre for *l'École des ménages*, Balzac began to talk of another play, which he offered in advance to the Théâtre Français, first under the title of *le Commerce*, and later, *les Mercadets*.¹ There is no reason to believe that during this year he did more than draw up plans for his comedy, for in May 1840, it is no longer a question of a play for the Théâtre Français, but of Frédéric Lemaître and the Porte-Saint-Martin. These were stirring theatrical days for Balzac. In addition to the refusal of *l'École des ménages* by the Renaissance, *Vautrin* had failed, and Lemaître had refused *Richard Cœur-d'éponge*. The ardent dramatist was now searching about with eagerness for a part to fit Lemaître's popular genius. To Mme Hanska he writes on May 10:

Elle est enfin trouvée, et je vous écris au milieu des travaux que nécessite *Mercadet*. *Mercadet* est le combat d'un homme contre ses créanciers, les ruses dont il se sert pour leur échapper. C'est exclusivement une comédie, et j'espère cette fois avoir un succès et satisfaire les exigences littéraires.²

By June of the same year the play was ready, but the actor for whom the principal rôle was destined wished certain changes made, and there seem also to have been serious difficulties with the management of the theatre:

Les intérêts qui se battent sur le cadavre de la Porte-Saint-Martin en empêchent l'ouverture provisoire que le ministre m'avait accordée.³

In 1844, *Mercadet*, according to the author's own statement, was not finished. After the opening performance of Sue's *Mystères de Paris*

¹ See Alfred Nettement in *la Gazette de France*, February 21, 1839; also, Gautier in *la Presse*, March 11, 1839.

² *LEt.*, Vol. I, p. 536.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 540. Gautier, in *la Presse* of June 2, 1840, declares that *Mercadet*, with a prologue and epilogue, has been finished: "Voici qu'on a la pièce et les acteurs; mais quand aura-t-on un théâtre?"

According to Lovenjoul, *Un Roman d'amour*, p. 150, the play was written in 1839. The author states, however, that he means a first version of *Mercadet*; that *le Faiseur* of 1849 is an entirely different play. "Comme pour *Richard Cœur-d'éponge*," he says, "Balzac a traité plusieurs fois le même sujet, et toujours différemment." Cited by Biré, *Honoré de Balzac*, p. 229, note.

on February 14, 1844, speaking of Frédérick Lemaître's success, Balzac writes:

Je suis content du succès qu'il va donner aux *Mystères*, car cela me donne le temps d'achever *Mercadet*.⁴

It was undoubtedly at this moment that the original play written for Lemaître in 1840 was reworked and finished. In March of 1844 preparations for a production of the play at the Porte-Saint-Martin ceased:

On veut une pièce gaie à la Porte-Saint-Martin, et, dans l'intérêt actuel de l'atmosphère dramatique du Boulevard, il y a certainement [là] un besoin à satisfaire; après les images dégoûtantes des dernières assises de la société, quelque drôlerie est nécessaire. Je lui ai promis de lui en donner une, car *Mercadet* est trop comédie et trop littéraire pour la Porte-Saint-Martin.⁵

In 1848, *Mercadet* had not found a resting place in any theatre in Paris. The author was at this moment desirous of taking it to the Théâtre Français. He had changed the name from *Mercadet* to *le Spéculateur*,⁶ and later to *le Faiseur*, for it was under this title that the play was read to the Comédie Française, August 17, 1848.⁷

In September of 1848, Balzac left Paris for a visit to Russia. During his absence the play was again read to the Comédie Française, and this time the register for September 14 and 15 reads: "La pièce est reçue à corrections." Learning of this, Balzac wrote to Michel Lévy on January 19, 1849:

La façon dont la Comédie-Française a accueilli la pièce du *Faiseur*, en manquant à des conventions préalables qui l'engageaient, m'a obligé à retirer la pièce.⁸

Objecting to the changes which the Comédie Française wished to make, Balzac asked that his play be withdrawn.⁹

⁴ *Corr.*, p. 386.

⁵ *LEt.*, Vol. II, p. 329.

⁶ *Corr.*, p. 561. Letter to his sister, 1847.

⁷ The theatrical register reads as follows: "Le comité, présidé par M. Lockroy, entend la lecture d'une comédie en cinq actes, en prose, intitulée *le Faiseur*, par M. H. de Balzac. Reçue à l'unanimité." Cited by Biré, *Honoré de Balzac*, p. 250.

⁸ *Corr.*, p. 590.

⁹ Biré, *Honoré de Balzac*, pp. 261, 262, note, quotes the following interesting letter from Arsène Houssaye, at the time director of the Théâtre Français, to Georges Malet, dated 1893: "Je n'ai pas refusé la pièce de Balzac, bien au contraire, je l'ai vu en ses derniers jours pour causer de ses comédies. C'est sous ma direction qu'on a joué les pièces de Musset. Je voulais également qu'on jouât les pièces de Balzac à la Comédie française. Seulement Balzac était comme Lamartine, qui aurait voulu Dieu le père pour jouer le rôle de *Toussaint Louverture*. Mais s'il était revenu à la santé, tout se serait arrangé, parce que nous voulions bien tous les deux. Vous savez mon point de vue sur le théâtre: toute pièce d'un homme supérieur, quels que soient ses défauts, devient une bonne pièce avec de bons comédiens."

One month after the break with the Théâtre Français, Hostein, director of the Théâtre Historique, hastened to offer his house for *le Faiseur*.¹⁰ But Hostein likewise desired certain modifications in the play to suit the tastes of his audiences, and again Balzac refused his consent to the alterations. To Laurent-Jan, who was entrusted with the dramatist's interests while the latter was in Russia, Balzac writes:

Ma sœur m'écrit les étranges transformations que Hostein veut faire subir au *Faiseur*. Ton esprit et ta raison ont dû te démontrer avant ma lettre qu'il est impossible de changer une comédie de caractère en un gros mélodrame.

Je n'ai jamais pensé que cette pièce pût aller au boulevard sans Frédéric Lemaître, Clarence, Fechter et Colbrun.

Donc, je m'oppose formellement à ce qu'on la travestisse. Mais je n'empêche pas que Hostein fasse faire une pièce sur ce sujet; seulement, il faut que tu saches et que tu dises qu'au théâtre personne ne s'intéresse aux affaires d'argent; elles sont antidramatiques et ne peuvent donner lieu qu'à des comédies comme celle du *Faiseur*, qui rentre dans l'ancien genre des pièces à caractère.

Donc, je me résume: ma pièce restera telle qu'elle est. Les sujets sont à tout le monde. Hostein, qui a une grande habitude du théâtre, n'en fera pas faire un drame, car il faudrait alors aller jusqu'à l'assassinat pour intéresser.¹¹

Mercadet was not accepted until a year after the author's death, when Montigny, director of the Théâtre du Gymnase, presented it at his theatre, August 23, 1851. After Balzac's death the play had been put into the hands of a professional dramatist and playwright, Adolphe D'Ennery,¹² who reduced the five long acts to three, and put the comic elements into bolder relief. It was produced under the title of *Mercadet*.¹³ The play, as treated in this study, is the original version made by Balzac.

On the day following the first performance, the Minister of Interior, Léon Faucher, ordered the play to be suppressed. On the twenty-fourth, the play was cut, and no representation was given on the twenty-fifth, but the following day it reappeared on the boards, having undergone certain changes in accord with the demands of the authorities. Lovenjoul has published from *la Revue et gazette*

¹⁰ *Corr.*, pp. 591, 592.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 599, 600.

¹² 1811-1899. *Émile, ou le fils d'un pair de France* was his first play. Among his other plays worthy of mention are, *les Chevaliers du brouillard*, *l'Aveugle*, *Don César de Bazin*, *les Bohémiens de Paris*. He worked in collaboration with Jules Brézil, Cormon, Dugué, Clairville, and with the majority of contemporary dramatists.

¹³ For the names in the projected cast at the Théâtre Français, see Lovenjoul, *Histoire des œuvres de Balzac*, p. 223.

des théâtres, August 28, 1851, an interesting history of the interdiction of the play, a part of which reads as follows:

Beaucoup de bruits ont couru au sujet de cette suspension momentanée. Il paraît que le premier jour les acteurs par suite d'un excès de mémoire, ont eu l'imprudence de livrer au public des mots, des passages qui avaient été supprimés par la Commission d'examen.¹⁴

On October 22, 1868, the Théâtre Français gave its first performance of *Mercadet* with Got in the principal rôle. Thirty performances were given at this theatre during the year.¹⁵

Mercadet, according to its original version, was published first in *le Pays*, August 28 to September 13, 1851, under the title of *Mercadet*. The play appeared in one volume, in-18, the same year published at the Librairie théâtrale, formerly the Maison Marchant, boulevard Saint-Martin, 12. It was published, one volume in-12, by Cadot in 1853 under the name of *le Faiseur*. In 1865, *le Faiseur* was added to the complete works, forming a part of Volume XVIII.¹⁶

The action takes place in 1839, at the home of a stock-jobber, Mercadet. We are at a moment when this speculator, the hero of a hundred doubtful transactions and equivocal manipulations of funds, is beset on all sides by his creditors, and is really in desperate straits. To all outward appearances Mercadet is rich and respectable: his family occupies an elegant eleven-room apartment, Rue de Grammont, his servants are in livery; a legend has grown up, moreover, about the confiscation of certain funds belonging to Mercadet and Company by a business associate named Godeau, and the latter's flight to the Indies—a legend which lends a lustre to the firm's name, and to Mercadet's position. We learn something of the real nature of Mercadet's affairs first from the servants, after an interminably long scene at the opening of the play between Mercadet and his landlord—a scene happily cut in its entirety by the adapter. Mercadet owes the servants an accumulation of wages, and they have seen creditors flocking about his house. We learn also that Mercadet has determined to marry his daughter to a certain wealthy young

¹⁴ *Un Roman d'amour*, pp. 153-7.

¹⁵ A. Soubies, *la Comédie française depuis l'époque romantique. 1825-1894*, 1895.

¹⁶ Lovenjoul, *Histoire des œuvres de Balzac*, p. 223. An English adaptation of *Mercadet*, made by George Henry Lewes, and called *A Game of Speculation*, was acted in England and the United States by Charles Mathews.

gentleman whose name is La Brive; that the daughter quite naturally loves another—in fact, a poor bookkeeper of bastard birth in her father's employ, whose name is Minard. Preparations are being made for a great dinner, at which Julie, the speculator's daughter, is to be presented to the man of her father's choice. Mercadet gives his orders to the cook—taking occasion, by the way, to persuade her to turn over her savings to him, with the promise of twenty francs per year interest. Enters the worst of his creditors, a man named Goulard. But Mercadet, in debt, a son-in-law to capture, and a dinner to give, is undaunted. In fact, he is keen for the fray. With a magnificent gesture to his wife, he approaches Goulard. Before the latter has ceased chuckling over his opportune encounter with this debtor, Mercadet already has him in his toils. Goulard has been dealing heavily in a certain Basse-Indre stock, "une affaire superbe." "Superbe!" say Mercadet, "oui, pour ceux qui ont fait vendre hier." Goulard becomes alarmed. "On a vendu!" he exclaims. "En secret," replies Mercadet significantly, "dans la coulisse! vous verrez la baisse aujourd'hui et demain." "Merci, Mercadet, nous causerons plus tard de nos petites affaires," and, thoroughly alarmed, the creditor makes a hasty departure. Mercadet smiles to his wife with contentment. With expansion he turns now to his daughter, Julie, to tell her of his ambitious plans for her future. But Julie is romantic, she loves a poor man, and romance has no place in her father's life.

In the second act, we see another encounter of Mercadet and his creditors. This time it is a poor broken old man to whom Mercadet has been in debt for many years. Violette assumes no lordly airs of superiority, but begs for his money, and talks of wretched poverty. Mercadet responds in the same strain—he has a mood for every affair—talks of his own poverty and sends the old man off, richer by sixty francs. In the meantime the finances necessary for the approaching dinner are lacking. It is to Verdelin, Mercadet's good friend Verdelin, that the speculator now turns. But Verdelin is obstinate, even in the face of the pantomime of agony which Mercadet employs. It is only the latter's threats of suicide, and the pitiable state of his family that finally bring the needed response from the good friend.

Mercadet's next encounter is with his daughter and her lover. These two plead their case with much ardor, talking of love free

from obstacles, based on the certitude of mutual passion, etc., etc., all of which Mercadet cannot understand:

Ma fille, va voir ta mère; laisse-moi parler d'affaires beaucoup moins immatérielles. Quelle que soit la puissance de l'idéal sur la beauté des femmes, elle n'a malheureusement aucune influence sur les rentes.¹⁷

Minard must be put off, and the speculator is not long about it. What course would the young suitor take if he believed his lady-love penniless? Mercadet pretends absolute poverty, and the poor clerk, who has seen his "pure love" through a mist of substantial dowry, now hesitates, unwilling to assume a responsibility which eventually might bring grief to his beloved.

In the third act, the young blood and dandy whom Mercadet has chosen for a son-in-law appears: La Brive, he calls himself, a masquerader under a false name, with tales of wealth and position. As Mercadet has been led to believe that this impostor has a substantial fortune, so La Brive has also been tricked by tales of Mercadet's wealth. Father and future son-in-law sit down to discuss the marriage settlement; La Brive talks of his pine trees and salt marshes in a manner that delights the speculative soul of Mercadet: "Vos terres, vos marais," cries the father-in-law, "car je vois tout le parti qu'on peut tirer de ces marais! On peut former une société en commandite pour l'exploitation des marais salants de la Brive! Il y a là plus d'un million, monsieur."¹⁸ Already he is rich; he sees his daughter's Paris house, her carriages, her gala fêtes; he reaches superb heights of eloquence. Finally the two young people meet. In the midst of La Brive's stupid attempts at love-making Julie tells him that her father is a ruined man, hoping by this means to cool his ardor. But La Brive does not believe her. Finally, comes the unmasking, when the usurer, Pierquin, one of Mercadet's creditors, recognizes La Brive as a certain "gibier de Clichy" of his acquaintance. But Mercadet, not to be outdone, reveals to La Brive his own share of deception, whereupon the two worthies put their heads together for a scheme of mutual betterment. La Brive has duped him with his salt marshes and his pines; very good. Mercadet has none the less deceived La Brive, and Monsieur Mercadet is an honest man. The two must combine their wits. Dinner is announced—the famous dinner given in the son-in-law's honor. Mercadet is now jubilant.

¹⁷ Act II, scene 9.

¹⁸ Act III, scene 8.

"Je serai le Napoléon des affaires," he cries to his friend Verdelin, who, none the less, fears an approaching Waterloo.

In the fourth act Mercadet's great scheme is disclosed: La Brive will be the missing Godeau, returned penitent and rich from the Indies! Basse-Indre stock, due to a panic instigated by Mercadet, is selling at a low rate; the false Godeau will buy innumerable shares of it, and sell as soon as the inevitable rise occurs. With lightning-like rapidity the news of Godeau's return is spread abroad, and Mercadet's creditors begin to fawn at his feet. But where is the missing Godeau, they ask. Whereupon the audacious speculator ushers him in. But the honest Mme Mercadet, a silent spectator until this moment during all her husband's business dealings, now denounces La Brive as a fraud, determined to save her husband from downright dishonesty. With unaccustomed energy she holds up to her husband and to La Brive her code of honesty and loyalty, and poor Mercadet, once more ruined, is again about to face his irate creditors. Minard, the poor clerk, now comes to the rescue and offers to marry Julie, and the act closes upon the two lovers reunited around the ruined father.

In the final act, with the stock bought by the supposed Godeau upon Mercadet's conscience, the miracle of miracles happens, and the real Godeau arrives! Godeau just as he has been announced, rich and penitent, and married to Minard's mother! Julie now accepts her wealthy lover, while Mercadet, with a salutatory to fortune on his lips, bids speculation adieu, having had his fill of its agitations and thrills.

We have seen that Balzac, from the time that his play was finished until his death, refused to make the changes in composition which were demanded by actor and manager alike: first, by Frédéric Lemaître, for whom the principal rôle was written; then by the management of the Porte-Saint-Martin, and later by the Comédie Française, who received the play with corrections which the author would not countenance. When the play became the property of the Gymnase theatre, the changes in composition which were deemed necessary were entrusted, as we have seen, to the professional playwright, D'Ennery. In the main, D'Ennery has corrected the salient faults of composition, changing the grouping of certain scenes that were badly arranged, and omitting others. For example,

the scene in the second act between Mercadet and Violette, excellent, but insufficiently developed, the adapter placed in the first act. The long scene between Mercadet and his landlord he has omitted. By weeding out certain unnecessary scenes, the adapter reduced the five acts to three, cutting the details which hindered the action. The comic elements, as a result of this rearrangement, were put into bolder relief. In the second act, the character of Minard was changed by D'Ennery. Instead of the young lover's renunciation of Julie after he learns that she will come to him without dowry, D'Ennery has Minard glorify his poverty, and declare to Mercadet that he can now ask for his daughter's hand with assurance and gladness, a speech which must have delighted the boulevard audience for whom the "jeune premier" must always be noble-minded and and self-sacrificing. In the last scenes as depicted by the adapter, Godeau actually appears upon the stage, and Mercadet, taking ten thousand francs from him, lends them to La Brive, exclaiming: "Ah! je suis. . . créancier! je suis créancier!" Without further discussion of D'Ennery's adaptation, let us consider Balzac's composition of the play.

We remark first of all few dramatic intrigues and a relative simplicity of action. The march of the comedy is towards the development of one character, the center and pivot of the action. *Mercadet* may then be regarded as a comedy of manners, where the interest lies primarily in the painting of character. To this the situations are subordinate. Having this central figure once fixed in mind, Balzac has built his situations around it. By depicting a series of conflicts between the speculator and his opponents, he has constructed an action that is ingenious, and scenes that are strikingly well-managed. In rapid succession, Mercadet meets and defeats his creditors—first Goulard, and then the usurer, Pierquin. Between these two scenes, as a sort of interlude, is placed the clash between Mercadet and his daughter, serving to relieve the financial tone of the act, and to introduce one of the main complications in the action. With the second act, the conflict becomes more acute, more obstinate. After the capital scene with Verdeline, where Mercadet threatens suicide, comes the encounter with Julie's lover, in which the serious tone of the comedy rises. Following this, the dramatist introduces a scene of "dépôt amoureux," to relieve the tension, and the act closes with the despair of Julie. In the third act we are ready for the definite crises of the play. The preparation

is complete: Mercadet has outwitted his creditors, and has turned aside Julie's lover. Will his ambitious schemes for a rich marriage succeed? Mercadet's encounter with La Brive leads to the comic scene of unmasking, when the two rogues decide to combine their wits. Finally, we arrive at the climax, and the complete defeat of Mercadet. With the close of the fourth act, Balzac has exhibited a real art in exciting the interest of his spectators. With Mercadet's despairing words: "Je sais ce qui me reste à faire," we ask ourselves what is going to happen, now that the speculator's crowning scheme is overthrown. Finally comes the return of the missing Godeau, and the closing scenes of real comic character.

In spite of the ingenuity which Balzac has employed in the composition of *Mercadet*, there are certain serious faults that must be noted. The first of these is prolixity: Balzac has not been capable of judging fairly or accurately the limits of his action. He has crowded too much upon the stage, and there results a superabundance of scenes in which the action drags, and where the comedy is not exposed with clear relief. The figure of the "faiseur" is constantly before the footlights; he is present in almost every scene. No doubt this is a difficulty which Lemaître saw when he read the play, and one which may have determined his refusal of the rôle.

Another fault, no less serious, is the presence of more than one confused bit of action. The many ruses of the speculator and the commercial stratagems which he employs, all take place in too short a time. We are bewildered by the succession of schemes employed by Mercadet. Balzac has made the financial questions needlessly obscure. Here we observe the dramatist's own passion for complicated business deals, his own interest in market quotations, matters difficult for the non-professional to follow. To expose a series of rises and falls in stocks, or to interest the spectators, as Scribe has done for instance in *les Actionnaires*,¹⁹ in the buying and selling of stock, the dramatist must explain himself with the utmost simplicity and clearness, and this Balzac has not always done.

We have seen, throughout the five copious acts, that the figure of Mercadet is constantly before the audience. As a result of this lack of measure, both performer and audience are at a disadvantage, for no rôle, however well presented dramatically and psychologically,

¹⁹ Comédie-vaudeville in one act, written in collaboration with Bayard; Gymnase October 22, 1829. *Théâtre complet d'Eugène Scribe*, second edition. Paris, Aimé André, 1837, vol. XVIII.

can retain its interest when the author has taxed to the utmost the endurance of actor and the attention of spectator. Balzac allows Mercadet to talk with exuberant spirits; his encounters with the creditors sparkle with vivacity and wit and verve. Here the author is in his rightful sphere; he is not hampered with the historical characters of a past age, nor the setting of a Directorate drawing-room; he is in the present-day world of commercial folk whom he knows, and he has much to tell us. Let us take an example of the dialogue in one of these scenes—the encounter of Mercadet and Goulard, the most dangerous of “ces messieurs” who haunt the speculator’s home. Mercadet rebukes his wife for interrupting the conversation, and the scene continues:

Mercadet: Ma femme a tort de se mêler de notre conversation, les femmes n’entendent rien aux affaires! (*A sa femme.*) Monsieur est mon créancier, ma chère; il vient me demander le montant de sa créance en capital, intérêts et frais, car vous ne m’avez pas ménagé, Goulard. . . Ah! vous avez rudement poursuivi un homme avec qui vous faisiez des affaires considérables!

Goulard: Des affaires où tout n’a pas été bénéfice. . .

Mercadet: Où serait le mérite? si elles ne donnaient que des bénéfices, tout le monde ferait des affaires! . . .

Goulard: Je ne viens pas chercher les preuves de votre esprit, je sais que vous en avez plus que moi, car vous avez mon argent. . .

Mercadet: Eh bien, il faut que l’argent soit quelque part! (*A madame Mercadet.*) Tu vois en monsieur un homme qui m’a poursuivi comme un lièvre! Allons! convenez-en, mon cher Goulard, vous vous êtes mal conduit! Un autre que moi se vengerait en ce moment, car je puis vous faire perdre une bien grosse somme. . .

Goulard: Si vous ne me payez pas, je le crois bien; mais vous me payerez, ou, demain, les pièces seront remises au garde de commerce. . .

Mercadet: Oh! il ne s’agit pas de ce que je vous dois, vous n’avez là-dessus aucune inquiétude, ni moi non plus; mais il s’agit de capitaux bien plus considérables! Rien ne m’a étonné comme de vous savoir, vous, homme d’un coup d’œil si sûr, vous à qui je demanderais un conseil, de vous savoir encore engagé dans cette affaire-là! . . . vous! . . . Enfin nous avons tous nos moments d’erreur. . .

Goulard: Mais quoi? . . .

Mercadet: (*A sa femme.*) Tu ne le croirais jamais! (*A Goulard.*) Elle a fini par se connaître en spéculations, elle a un tact pour les juger! . . . (*A sa femme.*) Eh bien, ma chère, Goulard y est pour une somme très-considérable.

Madame Mercadet: Monsieur! . . .

Goulard: (*A part.*) Ce Mercadet, il a le génie de la spéculation: mais veut-il encore m’amuser? (*A Mercadet.*) Que voulez-vous dire? De quoi s’agit-il?

Mercadet: Vous le savez bien! . . . On sait toujours où le bât nous blesse, quand on porte des actions.

Goulard: Serait-ce les mines de la basse Indre? une affaire superbe! . . .

Mercadet: Superbe! . . . oui, pour ceux qui ont fait vendre hier. . .

Goulard: On a vendu? . . .

Mercadet: En secret, dans la coulisse! vous verrez la baisse aujourd'hui et demain. Oh! demain, quand on saura ce que l'on a trouvé. . .

Goulard: Merci! Mercadet, nous causerons plus tard de nos petites affaires. Madame, mes hommages. . .²⁰

and Goulard, completely defeated, takes a hurried leave. The movement of this scene is rapid, and the comedy is excellent. Again, in the scene with Pierquin, there are repeated flashes of wit and picturesque turns of phrase: "L'usurier," Mercadet tells him, "c'est un capitaliste qui se fait sa part d'avance."²¹ In the scenes between Mercadet and La Brive the dialogue is managed with the ease of a master of comedy. Mercadet praises his daughter's qualities in the following words:

Mercadet: Oh! il n'y a que l'âme et l'idéal. Je suis de mon époque. Je conçois cela, moi! L'idéal, fleur de la vie! Monsieur, c'est un effet de la loi des contrastes. Comme jamais il n'y a eu plus de positif dans les affaires, on a senti le besoin de l'idéal dans les sentiments. Ainsi, moi, je vais à la Bourse, et ma fille se jette dans les nuages. Elle est d'une poésie! . . . oh! elle est tout âme! Vous êtes, je le vois, de l'école des lacs. . .

De La Brive: Non, monsieur.

Mercadet: Comment alors aimez-vous Julie, si vous ne cultivez pas l'idéal? . .

De La Brive: Monsieur, je suis ambitieux. . .

Mercadet: Ah! c'est mieux.

De La Brive: Et j'ai vu en mademoiselle Julie une personne très-distinguée, pleine d'esprit, douée de charmantes manières, qui ne sera jamais déplacée en quelque lieu que me porte ma fortune; et c'est une des conditions essentielles à un homme politique.

Mercadet: Je vous comprends! On trouve toujours une femme, mais il est très-rare qu'un homme qui veut être ministre ou ambassadeur rencontre (disons le mot, nous sommes entre hommes) sa femelle! . . . Vous êtes un homme d'esprit, monsieur . . .

De La Brive: Monsieur, je suis socialiste. . .²²

As in *César Birotteau*, *la Maison Nucingen*, and *Gobseck*, Balzac has lent to his characters the argot of commerce, and all their financial preoccupations are reflected in what they have to say. The author, who knows the mechanism of finance, the laws governing bankruptcy, the little details of the stock-market, reports them with scientific exactitude. But there is too much of this in the play, and the auditor, who cannot turn back at will to refresh his memory, as he is permitted to do when he follows out the intricate problems

²⁰ Act I, scene 7.

²¹ Act I, scene 13.

²² Act III, scene 8.

of Birotteau's rise and fall, discovers a lack of dramatic clearness in the play, and is finally bored.

The style of the comedy with its faults of diffuseness and obscurity already noted, is none the less energetic, and lends itself admirably to the study of manners. There are certain evidences, however, of Balzac's fondness for the pathetic which are out of keeping with the general tone of the comedy. When Mercadet, with Godeau's name on his conscience, threatens suicide, we descend abruptly into the melodrama. The evident intent of the author is a relief from the comedy, just as Julie's romantic tirade at the close of the second act serves to stir the audience to tears. Here Balzac has again failed in moderation. Julie is too romantic, too much the child of La Chaussée to suit the tone of his comedy. The same sort of appeal to those who love to see temptation ultimately resisted is made in the fourth act when Mercadet refuses to take Minard's money.

For the most part, Balzac has given Mercadet the blunt, unflattering language of contemporary life, filled with vigorous phrases and colored with a wealth of picturesque images. In so doing, he has produced a style admirably suited for comedy. His faults are grave ones, and are the faults of a novelist treading on unfamiliar ground: disregard for his audience's patience, an attempt to tell too much, with the result of obscurity. He has also sought to relieve his comic scenes with serious moments, but the result is a banal renewal of the violent language of the melodrama, entirely out of keeping with the general tone of the comedy.

About 1840, there was a mania in France for the organization of joint stock-companies, while jobbers and speculators became rampant in Paris. This activity marks one of the leading tendencies of the age towards business and commerce. People were occupied with making money, and the honest were no more numerous than the dishonest. The literature of the period is impregnated with this lust after money and the thirst for industrial activity. It is needless to dwell here on Balzac's preoccupation with this phase of contemporary life; the pages of the *Human Comedy* swarm with the figures of stock-jobbers, usurers, business men and bankers. In *la Maison Nucingen* (1837) he had already drawn a picture of the fraudulent accumulation of capital by speculation. César Birotteau

is ruined by the evil speculations and bankruptcy of his principal debtors. No writer was better prepared for the task of placing such types before the world in all their hideousness. Balzac himself had known personally a number of these figures of the Bourse and the *coulisse*; he knew moreover the feverish excitement of the speculator, and his own dealings in finance form one of the most complicated chapters of his life.

Who is Mercadet? A stock-jobber who chooses to be rich and cares little about the means employed in becoming so. He is primarily a man of business, but a business carried on in the by-paths of finance. His world is at the stock-market. For him the gold mines are no longer in Mexico, but in the Place de la Bourse. From the moment he enters upon the scene to hold our attention for five long acts, we are made aware of a character that is alert, resourceful, and occupied mainly with efforts to outdo his creditors. Above all, he is ambitious. He is a man who desires fortune at any price, employing the expedients which seem most sufficient to himself. He is also ambitious for social success. To his daughter he says:

Vous avez des talents, de l'instruction, vous pourrez jouer un rôle brillant à Paris. Si vous n'êtes pas la femme d'un ministre, vous serez peut-être la femme d'un pair de France. Je suis fâché, ma fille, de n'avoir pas mieux à vous offrir.²³

But the keynote to Mercadet's character is probably his audacity. "On paie d'audace," he declares, and indeed this is the only way in which Mercadet does meet his creditors. He feels himself superior to them, for he has their money, and they are waiting for his. With superb assurance he says to Pierquin: "Monsieur, je suis assez riche pour ne plus souffrir la plaisanterie de personne, pas même d'un créancier,"²⁴ and it is after this fashion that he meets all of those unfortunate people who dog his footsteps. Fears for his own future or for that of his family never disturb him, for his projects are mainly for the present, and he is convinced that the future will take care of itself. To marry off his daughter, he needs two weeks of opulence; after that, some other glittering scheme will fall handy, and consequently he has no cause for alarm.

Combined with audacity, Mercadet is imbued with the fever of a gambler. He undertakes his speculations with bravado. The get-rich-quick schemes which have appealed to certain spirits of

²³ Act I, scene 10.

²⁴ Act I, scene 13.

every age fill him with unrest and he has no peace until he has tried a hand at them. He talks of an "assurance contre les chances de recrutement;" he conceives the idea of a company for the exploitation of La Brive's salt marshes in the twinkling of an eye. Exact figures enter his head at once; he begins to reckon the incomes: "Il y a là plus d'un million, Monsieur," he says to his future son-in-law, and the plans for his daughter's future are momentarily forgotten.

Mercadet is also a man of expensive tastes, with a gambler's love of the luxurious and the showy. At all costs he seeks to hide his lack of funds under a cloak of good appearances. He is delighted with the gowns of his wife and daughter:

Une femme est une enseigne pour un spéculateur. . . Quand, à l'Opéra vous vous montrez avec une nouvelle parure, le public se dit: les *Asphaltes* vont bien, ou la *Providence des Familles* est en hausse, car madame Mercadet est d'une élégance!²⁵

He loves an expensive dinner, and talks in the language of a connoisseur about the silver and the family arms of La Brive's home.

What are we to say about Mercadet's integrity? He is certainly not honest—he stoops low enough to take the savings-bank account of his cook—nor is he altogether dishonest. He is artful and designing, and besides, feeble of character, easily led astray. Ruined by the flight of his business associate, he has permitted himself to follow the methods of the unscrupulous speculators with whom he is daily thrown. As he is more clever than they, he finds it a simple matter to deceive them. But he has never deliberately stolen. He has, like Scribe's Piffart,²⁶ audacious schemes a-plenty, dishonest ruses at hand, but his conscience is elastic, and he is neither a blackguard nor a scoundrel. The fact which partially excuses him, and prevents him from becoming antipathetic, is that Mercadet's victims are little better than he, and Balzac is careful to insist on this fact. He has taken apparent pains to protect him even to the point of recompensing him in the end. Mercadet has even a slight advantage over his victims, for he is a kind husband and father, and has moreover his tender-hearted moments, as when he shows generosity to the ill-fortuned Père Violette. Balzac has given Mercadet failings, great failings, but he has made them sympathetic.

Balzac has also made a real comic character of his speculator; his speeches are marked at times by sparkling flashes of wit—for

²⁵ Act I, scene 6.

²⁶ *Les Actionnaires*.

example, his encounter with Goulard in the first act, and with La Brive; sometimes with torrents of mock-heroic eloquence. Like the master who created him, Mercadet possesses a great fund of natural gaiety and good humor. He is fond of splendid-sounding phrases: "L'union fait la force! la maxime des écus de la République,"²⁷ he remarks jovially to Julie, urging her to marry a rich man. In his scenes with the supposed La Brive he is feverishly enthusiastic. Learning of the dandy's supposed wealth, he cries out with ardor: "Permettez-moi de vous serrer la main à l'anglaise."²⁸ When later La Brive appears disguised as Godeau, with exuberance Mercadet calls for his houka and tea. Finally, in the last act, he reaches the heights of eloquence and absurdity in his address to fortune:

Salut, reine des rois, archiduchesse des emprunts, princesse des actions et mère du crédit! . . . Salut, fortune tant recherchée ici, et qui, pour la millième fois, arrives des Indes!²⁹

There is also something of the cynic about Mercadet, and a great deal of satire mingled with his gaiety, satire expressed at times with the mocking laughter of the author of the Human Comedy behind it:

Ah! un homme dans le malheur ressemble à un morceau de pain jeté dans un vivier: chaque poisson y donne un coup de dent.³⁰

This is the word of the dramatist who had been unmercifully flayed by the press of Paris, whose indignation had for years been kindled to a white heat by the unfriendly and unfair pens of his critics. But in Mercadet we are able to see more than one personal touch of the author. Like Mercadet, Balzac possessed a great store of natural good humor which seems never to have deserted him, in spite of shattered dreams and feverish labors. To his creation Balzac also lends a portion of his own fund of "génie gaulois" and pleasantry, and something of his frank Rabelaisian laughter. In Mercadet also we see the reflection of Balzac's own audacity and vanity, something of the boastfulness of a Meridional. But the audacity of Mercadet is a trifle exaggerated and lacks naturalness, and his

²⁷ Act I, scene 10.

²⁸ Act III, scene 8.

²⁹ Act V, scene 6.

³⁰ Act I, scene 1. Compare *Quinola*, Act I, scene 1: "Un homme pauvre qui trouve une bonne idée m'a toujours fait l'effet d'un morceau de pain dans un vivier: chaque poisson vient lui donner un coup de dent."

vanity is of a grosser quality, possessing none of the naïveté that is one of the charms of Balzac. Mercadet, the Napoleon of business, echoes also the master's great boast to vie with the lost leader of his heart.

To Mercadet, moreover, Balzac has lent his own imaginative qualities. He is a man of ideas—ideas, it must be noted, tending to one goal, until they become a sort of hallucination with him. But his plans for the exploitation of salt marshes, for deriving a revenue from pine trees, were not chimerical; no more were Balzac's Sardinian mines. Something of the dramatist's great craving for luxury and elegance he has also depicted in the character of the speculator; but with Mercadet this never becomes an obsession, nor does it ever turn his mind from the bourse or his creditors. We see then that Balzac has inspired his character with a number of personal traits, a thing which he has done with no other of his stage people.³¹ It must not be forgotten in this connection also that the character of the stock-jobber was written for a special actor, and that Balzac regretted all his life that Frédérick Lemaître had not played the rôle.³² After the comedian's enormous success in 1834 in *Robert Macaire*, he became one of the most popular figures on the boulevard stage, and his creation of the cynical charlatan and amiable thief who lives by his dishonest wits became the model for more than one play of the time. Balzac had in mind the popular type and the popular actor when he planned Monsieur Mercadet. Later we

³¹ According to Lovenjoul, there are evidences of other originals in this character, and he mentions Victor Bohain, a speculator who was at one time director of *le Figaro*, prefect of the Charante, associate director of four Parisian theatres and founder of *l'Europe littéraire*, in which the first part of *Eugénie Grandet* was published. Bohain, unfortunate in his speculations, ended his days in poverty and bankruptcy. Lovenjoul also makes the following interesting citation from *la Revue et gazette des théâtres*, August 24, 1851:

"Balzac, disait-on, en écrivant cette comédie [*Mercadet*], avait voulu retracer la vie d'un homme qui fut préfet et directeur de théâtre. Cet homme, on le savait, possédait parfaitement la science des expédients et des ressources en matière commerciale; il avait dépensé en affaires d'argent autant d'esprit que Talleyrand en diplomatie, et que Napoléon en gouvernement. Cependant, après avoir lutté avec ses créanciers, après les avoir pétris comme s'ils eussent été en caoutchouc, il était tombé sous la faillite."

Lovenjoul adds in a note that this citation might equally apply to another person with whom Balzac was more closely allied, Harel, the former director of the Porte-Saint-Martin, who had at one time been the prefect of les Landes, and had ended his days in bankruptcy in a mad-house near Paris. See *Un Roman d'amour*, p. 151.

³² See *Corr.*, p. 592.

shall see that he was also influenced by one or two capital scenes from the same play.

Mercadet, we have seen, is not a thief, nor is he thoroughly honest. In fact, none of the world of jobbers, usurers, unlicensed brokers and creditors who surround him, save poor Violette, are honest. Like Pierquin, they are all too fond of their little refrain: "nous autres, nous sommes ronds en affaires,"³³ just at the moment when they are preparing to fleece some unfortunate victim. The servants too have learned a lesson from their master. They have not lived in a speculator's house in vain; their eyes and their ears have been constantly open. For them this family represents a portion of society to be scorned—the bourgeois. "C'est des gens qui dépensent beaucoup pour leur cuisine,"³⁴ says Virginie with contempt. The bourgeois are stupid in their love affairs. "Ils ne parlent que de l'idéal!"³⁵ declares Thérèse, recalling Mariane's reply to her mistress in *Turcaret* when the latter sighs about her "tender leaning": "vous aimez comme une vieille bourgeoise."³⁶ Justin, who has been with his master for ten years, to borrow Mercadet's own words, is a sort of demi-Frontin, with this difference that, where Frontin seeks to direct his dupery even against his master, Justin is content to remain his master's faithful imitator and emulator: like master, like valet. Justin seems but an echo of Mercadet at times. What is a business failure, demands Virginie. "C'est une espèce de vol involontaire admis par la loi, mais aggravé par des formalités,"³⁷ replies the faithful servant of his master.

On La Brive Balzac has dwelt with care, and the underlying intent in tracing this character is evidently satiric. This gentleman of fortune under an assumed name is a gambler, a boaster, a dandy, in Pierquin's words, a "gibier de Clichy," heavily in debt and masquerading with tales of landed estates and family position. Balzac has made of him a fool, whose world begins at L'Étoile and ends at the Jockey Club! He has taken upon himself to play the magnificent rôle of wealthy son, journalist, and politician. "Vous êtes un homme d'esprit, monsieur," says Mercadet to him. "Monsieur,

³³ Act I, scene 13. Compare with the following lines from Scribe's *Actionnaires* scene 9: "moi, qui suis rond en affaires, et qui paie toujours comptant. . . ."

³⁴ Act I, scene 2.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ Act I, scene 3.

³⁷ Act IV, scene 2.

je suis socialiste," replies La Brive, like Scribe's political economist M. de Montlucar.³⁸ Both the press and politics are scored in terms which leave no doubt as to the author's bitterness beneath the satire. First the journalists:

Il y a les journalistes qui écrivent et ceux qui n'écrivent point. Les uns, les rédacteurs, sont les chevaux qui traînent la voiture; les autres, les propriétaires, sont les entrepreneurs; ils donnent aux uns de l'avoine, et gardent les capitaux. Je serai propriétaire. On se pose dans sa cravate! On dit:—"La question d'Orient. . . question très-grave, question qui nous mènera loin et dont on ne se doute pas!" On résume une discussion en s'écriant:—"L'Angleterre, monsieur, nous jouera toujours!" Ou bien on répond à un monsieur qui a parlé longtemps et qu'on n'a pas écouté:—"Nous marchons à un abîme. Nous n'avons pas encore accompli toutes les évolutions de la phase révolutionnaire!" A un ministériel:—"Monsieur, je pense que sur cette question il y a quelque chose à faire." On parle fort peu, on court, on se rend utile, on fait les démarches qu'un homme au pouvoir ne peut pas faire lui-même. . . On est censé donner le sens des articles. . . remarqués! . . . Et puis, s'il le faut absolument . . . eh bien! l'on trouve à publier un volume jaune sur une utopie quelconque, si bien écrit, si fort, que personne ne l'ouvre, et que tout le monde dit l'avoir lu! On devient alors un homme sérieux, et l'on finit par se trouver quelqu'un au lieu d'être quelque chose!³⁹

"Hélas!" replies his friend Méricourt to this tirade, "ton programme a souvent eu raison de notre temps." And La Brive continues:

Mais nous en voyons d'éclatantes preuves! Pour vous appeler au partage du pouvoir, on ne vous demande pas aujourd'hui ce que vous pouvez faire de bien, mais ce que vous pouvez faire de mal! Il ne s'agit pas d'avoir des talents, mais d'inspirer la peur! On est très-craintif en politique, à cause des tas de linge sale qu'on a dans des petits coins, et qu'on ne peut pas blanchir. . . Je connais parfaitement notre époque. En dinant, en jouant, en faisant des dettes, je faisais mon cours de droit politique; j'étudiais les petits coins: aussi, le lendemain de mon mariage, aurai-je un air grave, profond, et des principes! Je puis choisir. Nous avons en France une carte de principes aussi variée que celle d'un restaurateur. Je serai socialiste. Le mot me plaît. A toutes les époques, mon cher, il y a des adjectifs qui sont le passe-partout des ambitions! Avant 1789, on se disait économiste; en 1805, on était libéral. Le parti de demain s'appelle social, peut-être parce qu'il est insocial; car, en France, il faut toujours prendre l'envers du mot pour en trouver la vraie signification!⁴⁰

It is necessary to recall Balzac's position at the time this tirade was written. In 1840, he felt probably more strongly than at any other time the need of defending himself against his enemies. At this time, when most of the journals and reviews of Paris were leagued against him, he founded an independent review in which he proposed

³⁸ *La Camaraderie, ou la Courte Échelle*, January 19, 1836.

³⁹ Act III, scene 5.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

to define his stand in literary, political and social questions as clearly as possible. He announces himself frankly royalist, an enemy of Thiers, of parliamentarism, of the government by Chambers and of the encroaching socialist party. In the first number of his review he writes, "Les ouvriers sont l'avant-garde des barbares." *La Brive* will be socialist, because the word is the catch phrase of the moment; as journalist, he will be a master of that "phraséologie hypocrite des débats quotidiens" which envelops public affairs;⁴¹ and the character can not have failed to convey the satire which the author intended.

In closing this discussion of the characters, a few words must be said about the two lovers, Julie and Minard. The daughter of Mercadet is the "jeune fille de convention" of the comedy, ready to end her days in a garret with the man she loves. She is romantic, and suffers the usual fate of the melodrama heroine, resigning herself to a life of unhappiness, and in the end rewarded. The poor employé, Minard, is a straightforward lover who woos with romantic ardor, seeing before him no obstacles to hinder his affection. However, after Mercadet's avowal of poverty, he declares that he has seen his "holy and pure love" through the medium of 300,000 francs of dowry, and hesitates to marry her. But Minard is prompted by generosity, unwilling to accept the girl because of his poverty. Later he uncovers a small fortune himself, and lays it gallantly at the feet of his prospective father-in-law. Balzac has failed to make Minard's generous impulses plain, and the adapter realized this when he strengthened the generosity and devotion of the character, melodramatic already in the hands of Balzac.

The great interest of *Mercadet* lies in its novelty on the French stage. If there are certain situations in the comedy which had appeared already in French comedy before Balzac, the author has developed them in a fashion which is essentially original. One naturally thinks first of all of the *belle scène* of the XVIIth century, the scene between Don Juan and Monsieur Dimanche, where the speechless creditor is plied with questions about his family, is overwhelmed with attentions and invited to sup, until he flees from the house of his debtor without uttering a word. In this one scene of Molière⁴² the

⁴¹ Introduction to first number of *la Revue parisienne*. July 25, 1840.

⁴² *Don Juan*, act IV, scene 3.

comedy is concentrated and sparkles with a verve and wit which may well have urged Balzac on to emulation.

Coming down to the end of the century, we find in Regnard's *Joueur*⁴³—another type of speculator who banks his money on the green table—the scene of the convocation of creditors⁴⁴ that Balzac utilizes in his comedy, and we see the gambler Valère with the aid of a rascally valet outwitting them with tales of an approaching marriage to a rich woman.

In the early years of the XVIIIth century, when the accumulating of money was a disease, and the epoch was tinged with the color of gold, Lesage left a picture of this phase of contemporary manners in his *Turcaret*.⁴⁵ The place that *Turcaret* holds in his age, Balzac wished *Mercadet* to represent in 1840, and the dramatic form which he has chosen is the same. Like Lesage, he has written a comedy of character, in which the situations are subordinate to the painting of one type, and this one type is developed by a series of loose episodes, with no serious preoccupation given to intrigue.⁴⁶ *Turcaret*, a revenue collector who is a public robber, like *Mercadet* passes off in society as a man of wealth and honor. Like *Mercadet* also, he has a taste for luxury, but the striving after money has destroyed in him all the finer sentiments. But the interest in Lesage's comedy does not center about *Turcaret*'s money operations nor do we see him duping his creditors, and here is Balzac's point of departure. Balzac, moreover, has protected his *faiseur* from outward dishonesty, and has stood firmly by his side, while *Turcaret* is ridiculed and scouted as a thief and a rascal, and his whole world is held up to the most biting satire.

The nineteenth century had also its *faiseurs* and public robbers; before Balzac's day they were ridiculed from the stage. At the very beginning of the century, Picard, with his *Duhautcours*,⁴⁷ had waged war on the dishonest financiers. In this comedy, Durville, a banker who has been ruined, tries to regain his footing by declaring a business failure and obtaining a bankrupt's certificate from his

⁴³ Five act comedy in verse, December 19, 1696.

⁴⁴ Act III, scene 7.

⁴⁵ Five act comedy in prose, February 14, 1709.

⁴⁶ Like Balzac, we are told, Lesage was offered large sums of money by the financiers who saw themselves mirrored in the character if he would withdraw his play from the boards.—Brunetière, *les Époques du Théâtre-Français*, p. 196.

⁴⁷ Written in collaboration with F. Chéron; prose comedy in five acts, Aug. 6, 1801.

creditors. Acting in Durville's behalf is an obscure agent named Duhautcours, who practises all the ruses of a scoundrel to deceive his friend's creditors. Duhautcours is, however, a masked figure, and is not the out-and-out *faiseur* that Balzac has made of Mercadet, nor are his ruses so clever. There are certain points of similarity in the action of the two plays which lead us to believe that Balzac may have been influenced by Picard's comedy. Durville has lost his money through the failure of a banker; in just the same manner Mercadet is impoverished by his business associate. Durville's nephew is in love with the daughter of a struggling merchant, while Mercadet's daughter defies her father by choosing for her affection a poor clerk. In both plays again the wife recalls her husband to the path of honor, and saves him from outright dishonesty. The dramatic contrast in *Duhautcours* between luxury and indigence is furnished by the sumptuous dinner given by the banker while his creditors wait outside. This bit of action Balzac has also repeated in his comedy.

The similarity between Scribe's Piffart and Mercadet has already been noted. Piffart has the same audacious schemes to propose, and sets to work with the same exuberant spirits. This speculator, enthusiastic over his artesian wells, no doubt suggested to Balzac Mercadet's scene with La Brive. Again, the scene where this clever charlatan is brought to bay by the stockholders in his worthless scheme, bears a striking resemblance to the same situation of Balzac's speculator. But the scene between La Brive and Mercadet was also reproduced in *Robert Macaire*: the scene of the marriage settlement between Macaire and the pretended Baron de Wormspire. So close is the resemblance, that we are led to believe that Balzac found his model here. Robert Macaire is believed by the baron to be immensely wealthy; he talks glibly of his inherited lands, his Paris home and his coal mines. In similar fashion, the self-styled baron, a penniless rascal who is seeking to palm off a girl whom he calls Eloa—a pretended daughter—draws up in exact figures the marriage settlement. Balzac remembered this popular and farcical scene when he came to write his comedy, and Mercadet's promises to La Brive of future luxuries, as well as the latter's boasts of châteaux and salt marshes, are the echoes of Frédérick Lemaître's genius.⁴⁸

⁴⁸ Among the great quantity of plays dealing with finance and the rogues of the business world may be mentioned: *Le Spéculateur*, by F.L. Riboutté (June 24, 1826); *l'Argent*, by Casimir Bonjour (October 12, 1826); *le Chevalier d'industrie*, by A. Duval (April 13, 1809); *Luxe et indigence*, by D'Epagny (January 17, 1824).

We see from the above-mentioned plays that Balzac has not been the very first to place a business intrigue upon the stage, nor to center the interest about a financial question. Not only were other plays written earlier in the century dealing with the same problems, but Balzac seems to have had several of these in mind when he came to certain scenes in his own comedy. Still, before Balzac this "littérature d'affaires" had not been developed, and the great interest of *Mercadet* is due to its novelty as a "pièce d'argent." The merit of the play lies in the originality and realism of its character drawing. Balzac meant it to be solely a comedy of contemporary manners, and when Hostein wished to introduce more action into it, to change it, as Balzac says, into a "gros mélodrame,"⁴⁹ the author was justly rebellious. *Mercadet*, to all intents, was to be a moral lesson to the century, and a satire on one phase of present-day manners. Just as the author had introduced finance in the novel with *César Birotteau*, so he introduces it here on the stage. Here, as in *César Birotteau*, he studies the newly developed commercial methods where speculation succeeds modest business dealings. A bourgeois Mercadet, like a bourgeois Birotteau, has allowed himself to be dragged into the giddy whirl of these new methods, and is ruined. We witness in both novel and play the repercussion of financial troubles on a virtuous and honest family. There is in both the novel and the play the expression of violent antipathy against dishonest usurers and big financiers, "ceux qui tuent une affaire pour en profiter."⁵⁰ Mercadet dreams of future riches, and has much the same imaginative soul as the old perfumer. Both Mercadet and César idolize their only child, a daughter, and both speculators have wives who advise wisely against their extravagant dreams, representing the good sense and virtue of the bourgeoisie. Plainly, the social intent is the same in both play and novel. Dramatically, Balzac has made here a wise choice of subject, for he is working in a field that he understands, and has chosen one which offers the greatest possibilities for a dramatic struggle. Thanks to its novelty, the comedy has a profound interest. As for its form and style, the faults are fewer and less disagreeable than those of the preceding plays, while in composition it is infinitely superior to the others. "Il y a là-dedans du Balzac, du vrai Balzac; il y en a beaucoup," writes Jules Janin,⁵¹ the bitterest of all Balzac's dramatic

⁴⁹ *Corr.*, p. 599.

⁵⁰ The expression occurs both in the novel and the play.

⁵¹ *Le Journal des débats*, August 25, 1851.

critics, and the expression is true, for no contemporary was better equipped to lift off the surface of lying and scheming, of boasting and trifled affections, to show us the glitter of gold beneath, than was Balzac.

It is in *Mercadet* that the younger Dumas later found inspiration for his speculator, Jean Giraud.⁵² Closely akin to Mercadet are also Augier's parvenu, Roussel,⁵³ and his audacious schemer, Vernouillet.⁵⁴ We have seen how France was in the throes of speculation at the time Balzac wrote his play, how business methods were beginning to develop and industrial enterprises to make themselves felt. The great interest and the great novelty of Balzac's play is that it is the first to present a phase of this activity on the stage, to denounce the corruption of underhand business methods by means of a character startling in its boldness and originality.

⁵² *La Question d'argent.*

⁵³ *La Ceinture dorée.*

⁵⁴ *Les Effrontés.*

IX

CONCLUSIONS

"L'auteur dramatique qui connaîtrait l'homme comme Balzac et le théâtre comme Scribe serait le plus grand auteur dramatique qui aurait jamais existé." So writes Dumas the younger in his preface to *le Père prodigue*. The expression is significant, and Dumas has noted in Balzac one of the most potent of dramatic qualities. A knowledge of the greatness and pettiness of the human heart, combined with a talent for observation and a powerful imagination, has made him a master of realistic character study. What he lacked was just this quality that has made Scribe the most popular dramatist of his age: an innate sense for the exigencies of the stage. "L'homme des plus habiles à serrer une intrigue, et le meilleur peintre de caractères que nous ayons eu depuis Molière," Gautier writes of his friend.¹ Where then has Balzac developed this dramatic gift which Gautier and Dumas and so many others allow him? Let us turn to the Human Comedy, and not to the plays, for our answer.

In his *Lettres sur la littérature, le théâtre et les arts* Balzac has written a significant phrase about the trend of modern literature:

La littérature a subi, depuis vingt-cinq ans, une transformation qui a changé les lois de la poétique. La forme dramatique, la couleur et la science ont pénétré tous les genres.²

Again, in the preface to his first edition of *le Curé de village*, dated Paris, February, 1841, Balzac writes of his novel:

Il ne s'agissait pas tant ici, de même que dans toutes les *Scènes de la vie de campagne*, de raconter une histoire que de répandre des vérités neuves et utiles, si toutefois il est des vérités neuves; mais les tentatives insensées de notre époque n'ont-elles pas rendu tout le charme de la nouveauté à des vérités vieilles?

Ainsi, dans le plan de l'auteur, ce livre, loin d'offrir l'intérêt romanesque, assez avidement recherché par les lecteurs et qui fait tourner vivement les pages d'un in-octavo qu'on ne relit plus, une fois le secret connu, lui paraissait si peu intéressant pour le gros du public, qu'il a semblé nécessaire de le relever par une conception dramatique, empreinte des caractères de la vérité, mais en harmonie avec le ton de l'ouvrage.³

¹ *La Presse*, November 19, 1838. See *Histoire de l'art dramatique*, Vol. I, p. 195.

² *Œuvres*, Vol. XXIII, p. 569.

³ *Ibid.*, Vol. XXII, pp. 546-7.

It is precisely this "dramatic form" which has penetrated into the composition of many of the novels that comprise the Human Comedy, and this "dramatic conception" of both subjects and characters which must occupy a considerable importance in the judgment of Balzac's work.

A novel can possess dramatic qualities only when the conception of subject is dramatic, that is to say, when it is founded on a struggle between two opposing forces. And not only so, but the interest of the novel must be found in this struggle, and be maintained by it. If we look at the choice of subject in the Scenes of Provincial Life we find the existence of this struggle to a marked extent. How often it is a feud between two village factions which constitutes the principal interest of the story. One immediately recalls the division of the little city of Saumur into the two hostile camps of the Cruchots and the Des Grassins, each fighting for the hand and heritage of Eugénie Grandet. Not only this, but we have also in bold relief the antagonism of the equally strong wills of father and daughter. In *Pierrette*, the martyrdom of the poor Breton girl is made apparent in the continuous struggles of two village factions, the one favorable and the other hostile to the Rogron family. Ursule Mirouet and her heritage are the cause of a bitter family feud, but in the same novel there is a struggle of no less dramatic interest between the atheism of Doctor Minoret and the fresh faith of his ward.

In the domain of finance and politics Balzac has also chosen dramatic subjects. The old perfumer, César Birotteau, at ceaseless war with his creditors, struggles with enemies of the most bitter sort. In his book about the peasants⁴ we have described the everlasting antagonism between the two great classes of society, the rich and the poor, the landowners and their tenants. In the masterful *Médecin de campagne* it is again the struggle of science against superstition, the efforts of a country doctor to break down the religious fanaticism of ignorant peasants.⁵ But it is probably in the Scenes of Parisian Life that Balzac has depicted most strongly this struggle: on the one hand, an ambitious youth, generally from the provinces, penniless, eager for fame and riches; on the other, the

⁴ *Les Paysans*.

⁵ To Mme Zulma Carraud Balzac writes: "Ce livre vaut à mon sens plus que des lois et des batailles gagnées. C'est l'Évangile en action." *Corr.*, p. 179. August 2, 1833.

relentless, alluring Parisian life, ready to deceive and corrupt. Such are the battles of Rubempré, of Valentin and Rastignac.

Society offers then to Balzac a wonderful picture of struggle. His novels center in this very struggle, and are, for this reason, dramatic. In a long letter to Hippolyte Castille he explains his intentions in the following words:

J'ai entrepris l'histoire de toute la société. J'ai exprimé souvent mon plan dans cette seule phrase: "Une génération est un drame à quatre ou cinq mille personnages saillants." Ce drame, c'est mon livre.⁶

And a few lines later he declares:

Cette opposition salutaire du bien et du mal est mon incessant labeur dans la *Comédie humaine*.⁷

Are we able to find in the characters of the Human Comedy, so often anatomically revealed by massed or scattered documentary evidence, a dramatic quality? Are we able to discover in the Balzac hero, aside from the long narratives of semi-scientific nature, aside from the curious pathological researches and financial compilations about which the author is so often apologetic, the psychological relief and clearness that the theatre demands? It was Balzac's great boast that his characters rival life itself, they stand forth as beings of flesh and blood. If this is true, we have found the essential quality which the theatre demands—reality in character conception.

What there is truly dramatic about the characters of the Human Comedy is the master passion which dominates them and forms the point of departure for the action. Almost all the great "premiers rôles" are the victims of an overpowering passion which is revealed by every word they utter, by every action they perform, and leads them inevitably to the great crises of their lives. So the greed of the old miser of Saumur develops by a series of successive steps. There is no trait, no personal feature, which does not reflect this passion, which does not serve to impress this figure upon our memories. Let us look for a moment at Colonel Chabert, the old cavalryman of Eylau. He is a "revenant" in every word and gesture; the pathetic figure of one who has seen visions of another world, who returns with a great longing in his heart for the peace of a home, and finds no place left for him. He brings with him a message from a

⁶ *Œuvres*, Vol. XXII, p. 364.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 368.

generation that is dead and buried, a tale of inhuman sights and sounds, of valorous engagements and grave-trenches, but nobody heeds his message. He is a ghost that stalks the strange streets of Paris. What there is intensely dramatic about this shadowy, unearthly figure is just this strong insistence upon unreality. Balzac has dwelt upon the old man's pale and thin appearance as he stands in the shadowy doorway of Derville's office at an hour long past midnight. He presents a total absence of movement and of expression. His eyes seem to be covered with a film; his intellect has gone, and there is a tremendous pathos about his attempts at gaiety, his forced and horrible smiles, the pathos that one feels in the presence of a harmless idiot. And the curtain falls upon the old colonel, a tottering inmate of the Bicêtre, tracing with his stick lines in the gravel walk.⁸

The insistence upon the excessive passion of Baron Hulot for debauchery, the mania of Balthazar Claës for chemical research, serve to throw these figures into vivid relief, stamping them with a complete physiognomy, so that they seem to rise from the pages and appear before us in all their naked reality. This quality belongs pre-eminently to the dramatist's art.

But the quality of the dramatist appears not only in the conception of subject and in the creation of character, but also in the form of Balzac's novels. "Un mot, un cri, dans Balzac suffit souvent pour donner le personnage tout entier. Ce cri est du théâtre, et du meilleur," writes Zola in his defense of naturalism on the stage.⁹ The succession of short scenes in which the characters are revealed by involuntary expressions which escape them quite naturally, or which express with dramatic force the overwhelming passion under which they are laboring, are legion. There are also certain scenes which, by reason of their abridged form and by reason of the subtle analysis of character and precise observation which they contain, might easily be transported from the novel to the stage without modification. These are the essential "scènes à faire," without which a play fails to reach the heart of an audience. In

⁸ It is interesting to note that in recent years our American stage has offered to the public two plays in which the interest centers about a ghost-like hero: *The Return of Peter Grimm* and *Van der Decken*, both plays produced by Mr. Belasco and acted by Mr. David Warfield. In each case the dramatic intensity is heightened by the unreal presence of a phantom hero.

⁹ *Le Roman expérimental*, p. 149.

them narrative gives way to pure action; the novelist retires for the moment, and the dramatist appears. Such, for example, is the scene in *Eugénie Grandet*, when the miser demands from his daughter the money which she has given her cousin. Such is the melodramatic scene in old Goriot's room, when his two daughters arrive simultaneously to beg for money, and are drawn into a quarrel which agonizes their aged, doting father. Here the dramatic interest is less concentrated, for the scene is very long, and Balzac has employed the most violent pathetic resources to produce an effect upon his audience. The expression of unnatural hate, as well as the fawning affection, the tears, the frantic embraces, the heart-rending cries, the supplication on bended knees, the Judas-kisses—are all calculated to inspire terror and pity. Such is the scene from *la Duchesse de Langeais*, when the unhappy woman is brought before her lover who proposes to brand her with the infamous mark of the galley-convict. Here we have a striking example of the romantic melodrama, the "drame populaire" which was holding the boards of so many of the Paris theatres of the epoch. The scene is thoroughly romantic, and the characters are exaggerated, but the elements of drama are present: an anticipatory excitement produced by the intrigue, where we ask ourselves what is going to happen; and the purely physical effects produced upon our nerves by the setting. Such, finally, is the short but poignant scene of farewell between the two old soldiers, Hulot and Marshal Cottin, from *la Cousine Bette*, revealing with subtle skill the intimate bond of friendship between them, and calculated to send thrills of pity and sympathy through the readers:

Adieu, Cottin, dit le vieillard en prenant la main du prince de Wissembourg, je me sens l'âme gelée. . . .

Puis, après avoir fait un pas, il se retourna, regarda le prince qu'il vit ému fortement, il ouvrit les bras pour l'y serrer, et le prince embrassa le maréchal.

—Il me semble que je dis adieu, dit-il, à toute la grande armée en ta personne. . . .

—Oui, adieu, car je vais où sont tous ceux de nos soldats que nous avons pleurés.¹⁰

In such scenes as these the novelist and his narrative retire for the moment, the documentary framework of the novel drops, revealing moments of action and dialogue, unmarred by useless detail, which might be transferred without the change of a word to the

¹⁰ *La Cousine Bette*, *Œuvres*, Vol. X, p. 305.

stage. Once, giving an analysis of *la Chartreuse de Parme*, Balzac wrote the following phrase:

Les portraits sont courts. Peu de mots suffisent à M. Beyle, qui peint ses personnages et par l'action et par dialogue; il ne fatigue pas de descriptions, il court au drame, et y arrive par un mot, par une réflexion.¹¹

And how often Balzac has done the same thing himself!

We are now prepared to ask why Balzac, who in his novels possesses to such a high degree the dramatic gift, who has penetrated character so finely, and has exhibited such powers of observation, should have failed when he approached the stage.

His failure is due to several causes.

First of all, the novelist, who had toiled with such herculean labor towards the perfection of his style, whose whole literary career was marked by progress based on past defeats, put little of this immense effort into his plays. We have seen how a number of the plays were written to relieve pressing financial conditions, while the author was at the same time overwhelmed with work on the Human Comedy. As a result, this theatrical approach became feverish and careless. "C'est toujours le temps qui me manque," was the repeated cry of the dramatist. Lacking time, and in desperate need of money, he did not undertake with seriousness the primary tasks of a playwright: the careful working out of his scenario, the grouping of his scenes into acts, the determination of the successive steps of his intrigue. He seems never to have had a clear vision of dramatic psychology with which to start his task, and his characters were improvised in haste. In spite of his excellent and clearly defined critical notions about the contemporary stage, he had himself no fixed ideas about writing plays. He was swayed by popular opinion, and accepted the most varied advice from his friends. In the beginning, we have seen him appealing to various authors for help, without first setting himself to the task. Gautier, Laurent-Jan, Ourliac and Lassailly helped him in the composition of *Vautrin*. With assurance he was ready to take the type that had made Henry Monnier famous, and to make *his* Prudhomme the only Prudhomme. To Gautier again he went for help with *Richard Cœur-d'éponge*.

¹¹ *La Revue parisienne*, September 25, 1840. *Œuvres*, Vol. XXIII, p. 735.

It was especially in moments of financial depression that Balzac wrote for the stage. At such times as these, he was influenced by popular productions and sought to amuse his audiences by writing parts for popular actors. So we find him, after Lemaître's immense success in *Robert Macaire*, writing for him the romantic rôle of a convict purified through love, the part of a drunken carpenter in *Richard Cœur-d'éponge*, and the adulterous husband in *l'École des ménages*. For the melodramatic talent of Mme Dorval he wrote the part of Brancadori the courtesan, and of Gertrude, seeing with bitter disappointment the latter rôle given to another actress. To Péréme, he writes that the success of *l'École des ménages* depends on securing a certain young actress whom he sought for the part of Anna.¹²

Balzac was influenced by the romantic drama, and later by the "drame de cape et d'épée," but he felt that he was unable to master the scenic effects of the historical play, and after *Quinola* it was abandoned. Historical tragedy cast aside, there was the ever popular melodrama, and it was in this field that he courted his public. With no single fixed tendency, his drama then reveals a confusion of theories.

To catch popular favor Balzac proposed to write for popular actors after popular forms. What then is the result of this frivolity? A bourgeois tragedy after the style of Mercier and Diderot, with a mingling of emotional melodrama—*l'École des ménages* and *la Marâtre*; an appeal to the romantic imaginations of those who like to see the purging of a criminal soul by nobility—*Vautrin*; a historical spectacle after the manner of Dumas, with excessively romantic characters—*Quinola*; a frank melodrama—*Paméla Giraud*. In none of these plays has Balzac risen above the forms already in vogue, and in none, with the exception of *Mercadet*, which must stand alone, is there an attempt to apply the rigorous realism exhibited in the Human Comedy, or the verity of character composition which would have made him the forerunner of Augier.

A still more weighty reason for Balzac's failure on the stage was his lack of knowledge of theatrical construction. His novelistic methods were a constant hindrance to him, consequently, the plays lack proportion and measure. *Quinola*, for example, contains a prologue of fourteen scenes; in the same play there are nineteen scenes in the first act, twenty-two in the second, twenty each in the

¹² December 11, 1838. Cited by Lovenjoul, *Autour de Honoré de Balzac*, p. 130.

third and fourth acts, leaving six to complete the long and tiresome action. The greatest fault of *la Marâtre*, a play which contains none the less some of the best dramatic scenes that Balzac has written, is just this lack of restraint. The greatest fault of *Mercadet* also, we have seen, is the superabundance of dialogue. In the wealth of material which suggested itself to the dramatist he found the greatest difficulty in choosing the significant traits, and in exposing them with relief. He became hopelessly confused in documentation; he threw out countless suggestions which were never followed out; in other words, he was attempting to express by the drama what might better have been said in the novel. The dramatic talent, of which we have such ample proof in the Human Comedy, was slow to develop into what we may call the theatrical talent. The novelist who succeeded, after years of patient toil, in making his characters live and in building an intrigue, was unable to forsake the looser framework and compress his action into the rigid form demanded by the stage.

Writing in haste after popular models, Balzac has failed in the delineation of character. His stage figures have all the serious exaggerations of the extravagant heroes of the Human Comedy without that subtle analysis which makes such figures tolerable in the novel. Under the influence of the romantic drama Vautrin and Fontanarès were conceived, exceptional beings, weighed down by fatality, lacking the lyricism and the poetry which permit such creations to live in the plays of Hugo or Dumas. Gérard is a shadowy Baron Hulot, whose senile passion before the footlights is grotesque rather than vicious. Adrienne Guérin, conceived by the author first as a female Tartuffe, is represented finally as a romantic heroine purified through her struggle, and become generous-hearted; a safe appeal to an unlettered public. Gertrude, a character so dramatically set forth in the first two acts, develops into the same sort of melodramatic heroine, a creature of violent emotions, lacking all repose and restraint.

Mercadet, of all the characters, and of all the plays, remains worthy of Balzac's name. Completed after the failure of his first dramas, a play which had been revised and reworked at various times, this comedy displays a serious interest in the stage, and reveals the fact that the author had acquired by perseverance and patience a knowledge of theatrical exigencies. Balzac chose as his subject a phase of contemporary life with which he was familiar. We feel here for the first time the keen and penetrating interest of the author

of *César Birotteau*, at work in a dramatic field. Moreover, here for the first time, in spite of the promise which *la Marâtre* gives, Balzac has worked out a play along realistic lines. He has made *Mercadet* the forerunner of the modern money play. Here for the first time is treated the relation of money to domestic happiness, the clouding of a man's moral sense by the dubious manipulation of funds. The interest in this financial question has led Balzac to the painting of a single character, a character of present-day society, based upon the author's own observation.

Balzac's failure to grasp a proper theatrical perspective has been the common lot of novelists writing for the stage, and the history of the drama abounds in such failures. The inability to compress action into such limits as are set by the stage and the ignorance of dramatic conventions are only too apparent in the sentimental comedies of George Sand. Zola, staunch upholder of the naturalistic drama, might well have contented himself with his social and scientific novels instead of offering them, lugubrious and ghastly, before the footlights. Sir Arthur Wing Pinero, in a study of the drama of Robert Louis Stevenson,¹³ has pointed out several reasons for this novelist's lack of success on the stage: the inability to realize that a play must be the product of hard labor, and consequently a levity of approach; an ignorance of the art of the theatre and of dramatic fitness. We are struck by the similarity of causes between Balzac's failures and those of Stevenson. Like Stevenson, Balzac did not find the time to develop the dramatic talent which was latent in him and fit it to the stage; nor did he cast aside as unworthy the outworn models which he slavishly followed, but whose faults he fully recognized. Like the Scotch novelist, Balzac was a great enough critic to realize that a play like *Vautrin* was after all a shoddy melodrama, a sort of "act-it-or-let-it-rot" piece, to borrow Stevenson's phrase about his own adaptation of *Robert Macaire*.¹⁴

At the close of his life, with the Human Comedy near completion, and with a clear and definite comprehension of the dramatist's task, Balzac writes:

La sculpture est comme l'art dramatique, à la fois le plus difficile et le plus facile de tous les arts. Copiez un modèle, et l'œuvre est accomplie; mais y imprimer une âme, faire un type en représentant un homme ou une femme, c'est le péché de Prométhée.¹⁵

¹³ *Robert Louis Stevenson as a Dramatist*. Publications of the Dramatic Museum of Columbia University, no. 4, 1914.

¹⁴ Letter to Henley, 1885.

¹⁵ *La Cousine Bette*, *Œuvres*, Vol. X, p. 196.

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² In the present study the two volumes of *Lettres à l'étrangère* are denoted by *LEt*. The abbreviation for the volume of *Correspondance* is *Corr*.

³ Chapters VIII, IX and X, *le Théâtre de Balzac*, appeared originally in *le Quinzaine*, December 1-15, 1895, and January 1, 1896; chapters XI and XII, *la Comédie humaine au théâtre*, in *le Correspondant*, October 25, 1895.

⁴ Article originally appeared in *le Temps*, May 8, 1899.

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¹⁴ Reprinted in 1858 in a volume of the same title. See *supra*.

¹⁵ Reprinted in *Autour de Honoré de Balzac*, pp. 91-195. See *supra*.

¹⁶ Reprinted in *Un Roman d'amour*, pp. 113-158. See *supra*.

APPENDIX¹

I

CROMWELL

The complete manuscript of *Cromwell*, a tragedy in five acts and in verse, is found in the Collection Spoelberch de Lovenjoul, at Chantilly: A 49. It consists of 68 sheets, written on both sides, of which numbers 13, 14, 27, 28, 43, 64, 65 and 68 are blank. Scene 5 of act III and scene 2 of act IV do not exist.

On the last page of his manuscript, fol. 67 verso, Balzac has left several interesting notes relative to the sources of certain scenes in his drama.

The second scene of act II, in which Charles I meets his wife disguised in ragged garments, after a long and grievous separation, Balzac tells us was inspired by the scene from Euripides' *Phœnician Maidens* between Polynices and his mother, Jocasta. The long monologue from act IV, we learn, was also inspired by Euripides. Henrietta's imprecations from act V, in which she vows vengeance against England and her enemies, Balzac declares was inspired by Virgil's Dido—*Æneid*, Book IV—and by Corneille's Camille—*Horace*, act IV, scene 5.

The list of characters reads as follows:

CROMWELL

PERSONNAGES

Charles I ^{er} , roi d'Angleterre	
Marie Henriette, sa femme	
Strafford, fils du ministre décapité	
Lord Fairfax, général parlementaire	
Cromwell	
Ireton, gendre de Cromwell	
Lambert, major de l'armée de Cromwell	
Fleetvold	
Barclay	
Bradshaw	} principaux amis de Cromwell; personnages muets
Harrisson	
Ludlow	
Thurloë	
Falcombridge	

¹ For the material on *Cromwell* and *Richard Cœur-d'éponge* in this appendix I am indebted to Monsieur Georges Vicaire, Curator of the Collection Spoelberch de Lovenjoul, at Chantilly, through whom I obtained the authorization to have photographed several pages of each manuscript, and to Monsieur Marcel Bouteron, Librarian of the Institut de France, whose notes accompanying the photographs have proved invaluable.

Percy	}	membres du Parlement
Lambot		
Suffolk		

Tous les membres du Parlement

La scène se passa a Westminster.

Le quatrième acte se passe dans la Salle des séances du Parlement. Les autres actes sont dans l'endroit de Westminster où se trouve l'entrée des tombeaux des rois d'Angleterre.

CROMWELL

MONOLOGUE OF CHARLES I

Act II, Scene I

Le Roi, *seul*

Heureux, cent fois heureux, s'il connaît son bonheur,
Celui qui, loin des cours, a su fuir la grandeur!
S'il n'a pas, au berceau, le poids d'une couronne,
(Que le Ciel nous ravit, pour montrer qu'il la donne!)
Il ne vit pas d'erreurs! il n'eut pas à signer
Le supplice de ceux que j'ai dû condamner,
Et s'il cultive en paix son modeste héritage,
De toute ma tempête, il n'a que le nuage! . . .
Vous tous qui gouvernez, méditez sur mes vers,
Ce que vient d'y graver le Roi de l'univers:
"Il ne vous suffit pas de ceindre un diadème,
"Pour avoir la science et régner par vous-même,
"Dans l'histoire des temps apprenez les leçons
"Que ma puissante mais adresse aux nations.
"En son ordre immuable, imitez la nature,
"De votre cœur, en tout, écoutez le murmure;
"J'ai fait la conscience un tribunal aux rois,
"Et tout l'erreur des cours n'étouffe pas sa voix!
"Elle vous dit assez que la sainte justice
"Ne doit pas, en aveugle, obéir au caprice,
"Qu'elle ne vous rend pas majestueux et grands,
"Pour être à vos sujets des éternels tyrans. . . ."

In the margin, at the head of this monologue, Balzac has written:

J'ai l'intention de changer en totalité ce monologue. Il est trop long, et ne correspond pas à la noblesse du caractère du roi.

II

RICHARD CŒUR-D'ÉPONGE

In 1835, Balzac mentions a play which was to occupy his attention for a number of years. He writes to his sister in October of

that year that he is completing a novel called *la Fleur-des-pois*,² and also a play, *Richard Cœur-d'éponge*.³ The latter statement is incorrect, for only fragments of this play were ever written and preserved by their author.⁴ These fragments have become the property of the Institut de France, forming a part of the Lovenjoul collection at Chantilly.⁵

The oldest versions of *Richard Cœur-d'éponge* antedate 1835 and the letter mentioned above. Of these primitive sketches, the first contains only portions of a first act through scene five, which is incomplete,⁶ while the second contains merely a clean copy of the first three scenes.⁷ The casts of these original versions read as follows:

First Version	Second Version
Richard, ébéniste	Richard, tapissier
Godeau, marchand d'acajou ⁸	Godeau, marchand de meubles
Duval père, fournisseur	Duval père, ancien fournisseur
Anatole Duval, son fils	Anatole Duval, son fils
Firmin, domestique	Marignac } jeunes gens, amis
Braulard, ouvrier	Verville } d'Anatole
Julie Richard	Firmin, domestique
Marignac	Braulard, ouvrier menuisier
Verville	
La scène est dans l'appartement de Duval fils, à la Maison Duval.	Le premier acte se passe à l'hôtel de Duval père, dans l'appartement de son fils.

In 1835, Balzac did little work on his play which he then planned to make a two-act comedy, with the title rôle for the actor, Bouffé.

² Title under which *le Contrat de mariage* was first printed.

³ *Corr.*, p. 225.

⁴ Lovenjoul, in *Autour de Honoré de Balzac*, p. 57, mentions the possible existence of a complete version of the play: "Nous possédons, datant d'époques bien différentes, de nombreux fragments de *Richard Cœur-d'éponge*, dont l'auteur s'occupa toute sa vie, et dont la seule version complète, remise, dit-on, à Frédéric Lemaître, aurait, paraît-il, été perdue par lui."

⁵ H. de Balzac: *Richard Cœur-d'éponge*. Fragments. Manuscrit incomplet. Collection Spoelberch de Lovenjoul, A 208. This manuscript consists of 63 sheets, of which numbers 8 to 13, 20 to 30, 46, 48, 52, 55 and 60 are blank.

⁶ Contains nine pages and cast.

⁷ Contains eight pages. In this version Balzac mentions three other theatrical projects: *la Fille et la femme*, *la Veille et le lendemain* (3 acts and 6 tableaux), and *Gobseck*.

⁸ Balzac utilized the name, Godeau, in *Mercadet*, giving it to the missing business associate of the stock-jobber.

He drew up a new list of characters, and wrote one scene for the two lovers.⁹ The cast reads as follows:

PERSONNAGES	ACTEURS
Richard, surnommé Cœur-d'éponge, ébéniste.....	<i>Bouffé</i>
Lemoind, entrepreneur en bâtiments, ami de Richard.....	<i>Verville</i>
Adèle, fille de Richard.....	<i>Eugénie Sauvage</i>
Adrien de Vaudrey.....	<i>Paul</i>
Justin, son valet de chambre.....	<i>Bordier</i>
Jules de Marignac.....	<i>Allan</i>
Bonébault, premier ouvrier.....	
Ouvriers, etc.....	

La scène se passe au faubourg Saint-Antoine, à Paris, dans la boutique de Richard.

Richard est un homme de cinquante ans. Lemoine en a trente-six environ. Ce sont deux amis intimes, à la vie à la mort. Richard a pour sa fille une passion aveugle. Elle est la plus belle personne du faubourg. Elle a vingt ans. Adrien de Vaudrey est un jeune homme de vingt-cinq ans, déguisé par amour pour Adèle en ouvrier, et qui, depuis un an, apprend l'état d'ébéniste.—L'action a lieu au commencement du Consulat.

In 1840, Balzac made another venture with his play, this time writing a plan of the first act, the opening scene of the first act, a part of a scene between Richard and his daughter, and a monologue by Richard. On this occasion the play was offered to Frédéric Lemaître, but the latter refused it. His reasons are set forth in the following letter which Balzac wrote to Mme Hanska:

Frédéric Lemaître a repoussé mon drame de *Richard Cœur-d'éponge* en disant que la *paternité* était un sentiment égoïste qui avait peu de chances pour un succès auprès des masses. Il n'a pas été d'ailleurs content du dénouement, et comme il faut ne lui donner à jouer que ce qu'il aime à jouer, il a bien été de nécessité de chercher une autre pièce. Elle est enfin trouvée, et je vous écris au milieu des travaux que nécessite *Mercadet*.¹⁰

Balzac was finding much difficulty with the composition of his play, and for this reason he searched about for outside aid. Théophile Gautier offered to help him arrange it for the Théâtre des Variétés.¹¹ On the last day of the year 1845, the two met at dinner at the home of Delphine Gay—Mme de Girardin—to discuss the project with Nestor

⁹ This version contains altogether eleven pages.

¹⁰ *LEt.*, Vol. I, p. 536. May 10, 1840.

¹¹ *Corr.*, p. 458. November 20, 1845. See also letter to Mme Hanska, dated December 12, 1845, and published in *la Revue des deux mondes*, March 15, 1920, a part of which reads as follows:

"Demain, je vais avec Glandaz à la Conciergerie. [Theophile] Gautier veut me servir de gâcheur pour la pièce *Richard Cœur-d'éponge* et le directeur des Variétés livre sa troupe. Il est vraisemblable que je risquerai cette partie, tout en finissant *les Paysans*, et [que] je négocierai pour la *prime*, à la Comédie-Française. Il faut tant d'argent!"

Roqueplan, director of the Variétés, at the conclusion of which it was agreed that there was no pressing need to complete the play, and it was abandoned.¹²

A final page of manuscript, containing a proposed cast of *Richard Cœur-d'éponge* for the Théâtre Historique, was prepared by Balzac after the opening of that theatre in 1847, and reads as follows:

Richard Duret, dit Cœur-d'éponge, ébéniste.....	<i>Bocage</i>
Pintard, marchand de bois des îles.....	<i>Roger</i>
Mayer, fournisseur.....	<i>Bignon</i> ¹³
Paul Mayer, son fils.....	<i>Laferrière</i>
Christophe, ouvrier.....	<i>Lepetit(?)</i>
Jacques Milon, valet de chambre.....	<i>Monrose</i> ¹⁴
Joseph Guichard } amis de Paul.....	
Adolphe Petit }	
Carmagnole, domestique de Mayer.....	<i>Gaspari</i>
Cécile Duret.....	<i>Mme Albert</i>
3 ouvriers	
2 domestiques	

RICHARD CŒUR-D'ÉPONGE

OPENING MONOLOGUE FROM THE EARLIEST VERSION

Acte Premier

Scène Première

Firmin (*seul*)

Voici donc le jour de la vengeance arrivé. Enfin! Ah, vieux père Duval, autrefois domestique comme moi chez le duc de Drancey, tu es devenu fournisseur de ta République, riche a millions, et tu t'es moqué de moi, tu m'as laissé domestique, tu m'as joué en faisant mettre à ton nom seul le traité des fourrages, et tu m'as demandé si j'avais des fonds, moi qui alors étais tout puissant aux Jacobins! . . . Et puis, au moment où j'allais vous faire guillotiner, nous avons eu le malheur de perdre ce bon et excellent Monsieur de Robespierre! . . . Et je suis retombé dans la crotte au moment où j'allais dire au père Duval: la moitié de ton quibus, ou ta tête. . . . En a-t-il fait du chemin depuis ce temps-là? Il a acheté des hôtels, des biens nationaux, et est lié avec Monsieur de Barras. Son fils est l'ami de Madame de Bonaparte. . . . Les citoyens directeurs ne jurent que par lui, et le voilà dans les secrets du général en chef des armées d'Orient qui va peut-être confisquer tout à son profit. . . . Il va devenir un personnage, et moi, je reste valet de chambre, moi qui ai plus d'esprit que lui; mais j'ai joué de malheur, et je pensais au pouvoir quand il brigait à l'argent. . . .

¹² *Corr.*, pp. 486-7. January 4, 1846. See also letter of Mme de Girardin to Balzac, published by Lovenjoul in *la Genèse d'un roman de Balzac. Les Paysans*, p. 253.

¹³ Creator of Fontanarès, in *les Ressources de Quinola*, at the Odéon, March 19, 1842.

¹⁴ Creator of Quinola at the Odéon, March 19, 1842.

III

PROSE PLAN OF "ORGON," ACT I

Spoelberch de Lovenjoul has published in *Le Figaro*, May 21, 1899, the following fragment of *Orgon*, a projected play, the first act of which was versified by the poet, Amédée Pommier, following faithfully a prose version made by Balzac. Except for one page of this version, which is reproduced below, a list of characters and a few notes made by the author,¹⁵ all trace of Balzac's *Orgon* has been lost.

Scène Première

Dorine, Damis

Dorine.—Monsieur, vous fîtes bien de servir le Roi, et l'habit de mousquetaire vous sied; vous avez bonne façon; mais de la vie militaire prenez le bon, laissez le mauvais. Vous avez affaire à des seigneurs qui, sur l'article de dés et cartes, en savent plus que vous. Deux fois déjà j'ai pris sur moi de parler à votre père. Mais, pour cette dernière fredaine, je n'y puis rien. Adressez-vous à Mme votre grand-mère, Mme Pernelle, qui, maintenant, est la seule qui écoute.

Damis.—Les affaires d'honneur ne souffrent pas de retard, et je quitterai la compagnie après m'être battu. Ce sera plus cher, car il faudra quitter le royaume, et mon père sera plus chagrin de ceci; sans compter mon entretien à l'étranger.

Dorine.—Et pourquoi jouez-vous?

Damis.—Je suis mousquetaire.

Dorine.—N'y a-t-il que du jeu? . . .

Damis.—Le jeu . . .

Dorine.—Quelques soupers à la Pomme-de-Pin? Vous donnez tous aussi par trop de soucis à ce pauvre M. Orgon! Pour madame, ce sont à chaque instant ajustements nouveaux. Elle est de toutes les fêtes et ne fait plus qu'à sa tête. Votre sœur et Valère voient la belle compagnie, qui vient, va, mange, et vous avez tous des raisons à donner. Le maître seul a tort.

Damis.—N'en parlons plus. J'emprunterai; ce sera bien plus dommageable, car l'usurier est cher en diable!

Dorine.—Allons, je tâcherai de le bien disposer.

Damis.—Donc, tu lui demanderas ces mille pistoles?

Dorine.—Tudieu! Vous allez vite en paroles! Croyez-vous qu'on extrait cet argent d'un vieillard soucieux, exigeant, etc., en lui disant: "Votre fils vous demande mille pistoles; donnez-les lui!" Une pareille demande fait tout refuser. Le voici. Laissez-moi faire. De toutes les manières de demander, la directe est la plus mauvaise.

Damis.—C'est vrai, rien ne va droit dans la nature, ni le soleil, ni la femme.

Scène Deuxième

Les mêmes, Orgon

Dorine, à Damis.—Il a, vous le voyez, mal dormi. Ce n'est pas un beau réveil, que de lui dire: "Votre fils a perdu cette nuit." Vous avez eu la joie, et c'est à nous qu'il en cuit.

Orgon.—J'en étais sûr; dès que je suis chouché, ma. . .

¹⁵ See p. 30.

